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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

A CHARACTER STUDY OF JEREMIAH

by

John William Lewien

(A.B., Hastings College, 1932)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1934



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- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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"Earth's crown'd with heaven,  
And every flower hath its ally with God;  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes -  
The rest all round it and pluck themselves." -  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning



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## Chapter I

### Sources of the Life of Jeremiah

The word Jeremiah to most people means a book in the prophetic section of the Old Testament. Second thought recalls the fact that there was a prophet by that name but the popular conception of this prophet is vague and unjust. It is the purpose of this study so to reconstruct the characteristics of this prophet that he will stand out as a living human being with likes and dislikes, longings and desires, similar to men of today but with a character that stands out like a diamond in a tray of glass stones.

#### 1. The Book of Jeremiah

But Jeremiah lived and prophesied over fifteen hundred years ago so it is impossible to secure any first-hand material concerning his life and character, except his book. Therefore we need to turn to this source if we would learn to know him and to other sections in the Bible. The book called Jeremiah is generally conceded to have been written by the prophet of that name and this book, when correctly interpreted, gives us an excellent life-sized portrait of the man. Therefore we turn our attention to this book.

The book of Jeremiah is composed of fifty-two chapters and along with the book of Isaiah is one of the two largest books of the prophets. Its size probably had much to do with

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the appellation of the term "major" in connection with both the book and prophet. However, as we continue studying the man, we shall discover that he was certainly preeminent as a prophet and a character among the grand old men of the Old Testament.

#### a. Its Authorship.

The book of Jeremiah makes difficult reading for the average Bible student and no wonder, for its various sections do not seem to follow each other in any sensible form. For this reason the book is often neglected and almost as often misunderstood. In the first place we need to face the fact that Jeremiah did not write all the chapters found in his book and secondly we note that even those he did write are not placed in chronological order but seem to be in grand disarray in this regard. For an example of this turn to chapter 25, which unmistakably was written in 605 B.C. and then compare with chapter 24, which comes at least eight years later and also compare chapter 21:1-10, which reflects the period of the siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

This simple introduction serves to show us that we can not safely take the book of Jeremiah as found in our Bible versions today and expect to get a true picture of the prophet by a careful study of the chapters one after another. Not only are the chapters and verses out of order chronologically but some of them were written by other men, in fact very little of the book

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"On the face of it, then, the Book is a compilation from several sources; and perhaps we ought to translate the opening clause of its title not as in our versions, 'The Words of Jeremiah,' but 'The History of Jeremiah,' as has been legitimately done by some scholars since Kimchi." <sup>1</sup>.

#### b. Stages in its development.

For the beginning of the book we turn to chapter 36 which was written in 604 B.C. after Jeremiah had been preaching for over twenty years. At this time, (605 B.C.) the battle of Carchemish caused the people of Jerusalem to realize their peril when Egypt was defeated by the Babylonians. Jeremiah felt that he should put his prophecies and warnings into writing so that the people would hear them from other lips than his own and also that this might cause them to pay more attention to their message.

This chapter suggests to us the origin of the book but this, as previously pointed out, is not the only source of the book. In reconstructing the creation of this book we find that the compilation of this book consists of eight stages or phases.

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1. George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, p. 9-10



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Chapter 36 tells how Jeremiah dictated the prophecies to his faithful scribe, Baruch, who then proceeded to read them in the Temple "in the ears of the people." Then when the Princes heard about this public rendition they requested that Baruch read the scroll to them which he did. The Princes then told king Jehoiakim about the scroll who in turn demanded that it be read in his presence. At the advice of the Princes, Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch were in hiding because of the unwelcome prophecies in the scroll so Jehudi the scribe read the roll to the king who cut it off page by page or section by section as it was read and burnt them on an open fire before him. The prophecies had made no impression on the king and so the fate of that roll was, **relegation** to the fire. The king did not wish his people to read the flaming messages of the prophet so the purpose of the first roll was not realized. But Jeremiah and Baruch set about to produce the second edition or the second roll with the purpose in mind of preserving the prophecies, to give a "permanent form to all the fruits of Jeremiah's previous ministry." <sup>1</sup>. This second roll was, like the first, dictated by Jeremiah to Baruch, "and there were added besides unto them many like words." The second roll was probably written the year after the first one appeared, or in 603 B.C. The fact that Jeremiah was in hiding from the king and his order to arrest both Jeremiah and Baruch, probably resulted in giving them much time to meditate over the writing of the second roll and thus they were able to reproduce the first with a more complete list of the prophecies given by Jeremiah in the previous years.

<sup>1</sup>. George Adam Smith, op. cit., p. 25



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This second roll is no doubt the central part of our book as we find it today but this is not the final addition to the prophecies. We discover that there are many other events that certainly took place after this second edition in 603 B.C. Chapter 29 is an example in which we find a letter written to the exiles in Babylon which would place these verses several years later. In chapter 44 we have some prophecies of Jeremiah delivered when the prophet was near the close of his life in Egypt. "So, in the years following 604 B.C., we must imagine that Jeremiah dictated other prophecies now incorporated in our present book of Jeremiah." <sup>1</sup>.

But the above stages refer only to the additions made by Jeremiah himself or rather dictated to his scribe, Baruch, who wrote them for him. We owe a great debt to this faithful scribe who was as important to Jeremiah for us as Boswell was for Johnson or Luke was for Paul. Dr. Calkins shows us something of the faithfulness of Baruch and of his mission.

"It (his mission) began with the task of writing out the prophecies of Jeremiah and carrying them to the people and to the princes. The words: 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not,' braced the young nobleman to drink the cup, to face the wrathful multitude and to be Jeremiah's emissary to the court of Jehoiakim. Thereafter Baruch never left the prophet." <sup>2</sup>.

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 34

2. *ibid*, p. 34



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### c. Baruch, the Scribe

One could not make a fair study of Jeremiah and leave out Baruch. He was probably of high birth and when he cast his lot in with Jeremiah he had much to give up. His call was a definite one as was that of Jeremiah. Baruch had to bear danger and hardship with his teacher, Jeremiah, and for this we are eternally grateful to him for this qualified him to give us an imposing but truthful picture of the great heart of Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Jeremiah never wrote a word of his book and if so, then we are entirely dependent upon Baruch and other writers for our story of the prophet. So now we turn our attention to the possibility of other writers.

Some time after the death of Jeremiah some one or several persons began to collect, combine and enlarge on the numerous fragments of the oracles left by Jeremiah and Baruch. Perhaps the chief interest of this man or men was to produce a biography of the prophet rather than to compile the book itself. At any rate he had access to the various utterances of Jeremiah and so produced the book of Jeremiah we have in the Hebrew translation. "---probably the compiler himself, either from his own knowledge or by enquiry, was able also to make considerable contributions. But how much belongs to sources ready to the compiler's hand, and how much is due to himself it is impossible to discover."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Raymond Calkins, op. cit., pp. 182-186

2. James Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. II, pp. 575



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d. The two texts of Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah comes down to us through the years in what amounts to a double text. These two texts are the Hebrew Bible, and the Greek Septuagint, (LXX). The latter contains only about seven eighths of the text found in the older Hebrew Bible. But on the other hand the Greek text or translation has several hundred words that are not to be found in the Hebrew. These extra words are probably due to the additions made by the translators or paraphrases of the shorter Hebrew sections. The omissions were either due to carelessness or were deliberate in the belief that they were not necessary or perhaps thought to be spurious. The Greek sometimes corrects the metre or yields sense when the Hebrew fails to do so. <sup>1</sup>.

But it is to be noticed that all of these differences are practically unimportant. The only other main difference is the arrangement of the text. In the LXX the prophecies against the foreign nations comes after chapter 25:13, instead of near the end of the book as in Hebrew Bible. Some students seem to think that the longer text has gone through gradual expansion until it has attained the present size.

"The extent of these additions has already been illustrated by comparison with the Septuagint, and very often the passages which are not supported by the Greek text are historically the least trustworthy, cf. 39:11, 12. These different recensions of the original text attest the wide popularity of the

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1. George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, pp. 12



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book; an Aramaic gloss in 10:11 shows the liberties which transcribers took with the text, the integrity of which suffered much from its very popularity." <sup>1</sup>.

#### e. The Authentic Passages.

But our purpose in reviewing the compilation of the book of Jeremiah is primarily to determine the passages that we may definitely ascribe to Jeremiah and thus secure knowledge of his life and character. Obviously, not all of the book belongs to Jeremiah or even to his time but there is one criterion by which we can determine which is original and what is added.

"All Oracles or Narratives in the Book, which (apart from obvious intrusions) imply that the Exile is well advanced or that the Return from Exile has already happened, or which reflect the circumstances of the later Exile and subsequent periods or the spirit of Israel and the teaching of the prophets and scribes in those periods, we may rule out of the material on which we can rely for our knowledge of Jeremiah's life and his teaching." <sup>2</sup>.

With this criterion in mind we have a working formula whereby we can point out the true passages that are strictly Jeremic with some assurance that we are studying the exact thought of the prophet. That the book of Jeremiah was considered authentic and important in his time and shortly after is shown by the fact that Jeremiah is twice quoted in II Chronicles and once in Ezra. Allusions are made to him in Ecclesiasticus 49: 6-7, and in Lamentations, while Daniel 9:2 refers to Jeremiah

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1. John Edgar McFadyen, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 186

2. George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, pp. 19



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25:12. "A paragraph in the Second Book of Maccabees, chapter 11:1-8, contains, besides echoes of our Book of Jeremiah, references to other activities of the Prophet of which the sources and the value are unknown to us." <sup>1</sup>.

Further evidence of the importance of the book is to be found in the fact that there are parallel passages of Jeremiah in II Kings.

"Verses 1-27, (Jeremiah 52:1-27) which describe the final captivity under Zedekiah, are parallel to II Kings 24:18 to 25:21, while vv. 4-16 have already appeared as Jeremiah 39:1-10. Again vv. 31-34, which deal with the ultimate fate of Jehoiachin, are parallel to II Kings 25:27-30. Between these sections this chapter places three verses which give the number of the exiles deported by Nebuchadrezzar. In the same place Second Kings sets a very brief synopsis, summarizing chapters 40 to 43 in Jeremiah and relating events in Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem." <sup>2</sup>.

We have seen the disarray of topics in the compilation of the book of Jeremiah and have also noticed that these topics not only do not follow each other chronologically but also that many of them can not even be dated in the time of Jeremiah. We have also seen what importance was given the book of Jeremiah by men shortly after the time of the prophet. Because of veneration for the book it was therefore more widely read and scholars reading did not hesitate to make additions or changes as they saw fit for literary honesty of that time was much different from that of today.

1. George Adam Smith, op. cit. pp. 8  
 2. Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 708



25:12. "A paragraph in the Second Book of Kings, chapter 11:1-8, contains, besides echoes of our Book of Jeremiah, references to other activities of the Prophet of which the sources and the value are unknown to us." 1.

Further evidence of the importance of the book is to be found in the fact that there are parallel passages of Jeremiah in II Kings.

"Verses 1-27, (Jeremiah 22:1-27) which describe the final captivity under Zedekiah, are parallel to II Kings 24:18 to 25:21, while vv. 4-16 have already appeared as Jeremiah 39:1-10.

Again vv. 21-34, which deal with the ultimate fate of Jerusalem, are parallel to II Kings 25:27-30. Between these sections this chapter places three verses which give the number of the exile deported by Nebuchadnezzar. In the same place Second Kings sets a very brief synopsis, summarizing chapters 40 to 45 in Jeremiah and relating events in Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem." 2.

We have seen the disparity of topics in the compilation of the book of Jeremiah and have also noticed that these topics not only do not follow each other chronologically but also that many of them can not even be dated in the time of Jeremiah. We have also seen what importance was given the book of Jeremiah by men

shortly after the time of the prophet. Because of veneration for the book it was therefore more widely read and scholars reading did not hesitate to make additions or changes as they saw fit for literary honesty of that time was much different from that of today.



#### f. Divisions of the Book.

Regardless of the disarrangement of the topics that are found in the book we may divide the book quite easily into various sections for convenience in study. Some scholars have attempted to rearrange the text in a chronological order but this has proven to be a painstaking task though a much worth while one. It is often difficult to determine the date of certain passages because of the glosses. We need to remind ourselves here, that most of the topics in this book were written sometime after they were first uttered, in fact, a great many years later. This probably led to the practice of touching up the prophecies or oracles so as better to fit the day and the hour that they were finally written. But in spite of this we have pointed out that the growth of the book of Jeremiah was a more or less gradual one of successive stages and this should be remembered. We will now consider the outline or divisions of the book to simplify its teachings.

A simple, popular outline is given by Dr. Elmer Leslie, as follows:

- I. Chapters 1 to 25. Jeremiah's prophecies to Judah with certain narrative sections.
- II. Chapters 26 to 45. Narratives with some prophecies.
- III. Chapters 46 to 51. Prophecies concerning foreign nations.
- IV. Chapter 52. A parallel to II Kings 24 and 25.<sup>1</sup>

The above outline is simple and gives us a brief glimpse of the contents of the book of Jeremiah. But for a complete

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1. Elmer A. Leslie, Class notes in course PROPHETS OF ISRAEL, for Jan. 10, 1934, Boston University School of Theology.



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understanding of the book we need a fuller outline such as that given by G. G. Findlay as follows:

I. THE GREAT BOOK OF DOOM, dictated by Jeremiah in B.C. 604

Chapters 1-20 and 25, with parts (probably) of 46-51, corresponding to the original volume read by Baruch (36:2 and v. 10) and the many like words added on re-writing. (36:32)

a. The book burnt by Jehoiakim: chapters 2-13 (minus 9:23 to 10:16 etc.)

This included: -

1. The judgment upon Judah's treachery towards Jehovah: chapters 2 to 6, embodying Jeremiah's prereformation teaching.

2. The judgment upon Judah's hypocrisy. Chapters 7-12 (12:7-17); minus 9:23 - 10:16); belong to the post-reformation preaching of 608 and onwards.

b. The 'many like words of doom,' illustrating (a) chapters 1, 14 to 20 and probably 25 etc; consisting of scenes and reminiscences from Jeremiah's earlier ministry, up to B.C. 604.

II. THE JUDGMENT OF THE SHEPHERDS (kings, priests, and prophets); Chapters 21 to 23.

III LATER MEMORANDA OF JEREMIAH, extending from c. 600 B.C. to 593, Chapters 12: 7-17 (?) 13; 24; 27-29; and 35.

IV. THE LITTLE BOOK OF CONSOLATION: chapters 30-33, dating from the second siege.



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- IV. THE LITTLE BOOK OF CONSOLATION: chapters 30-33, dating from the second stage.



V. BARUCH'S MEMOIRS OF JEREMIAH:

- a. Before the fall of Jerusalem (covered by the title in 1:1-3) chapters 26; 36; 37-39; with 21:1-10.
- b. After the fall of Jerusalem chapters 40 to 45.
- c. Baruch's personal note: chapter 45.

Whether the above memoirs were introduced by Baruch or extracted by later editors from a separate work of his, cannot be determined with certainty.

VI. THE COLLECTION OF FOREIGN ORACLES: chapters 46 to 49 (50:2 to 51:58). 51:59-64 against Egypt (2) Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazer, Elam (Babylon).

VII THE HISTORICAL APPENDIX: chapter 52, nearly identical, by general admission, with II Kings 24:18 to 25:30.

-----and post-Jeremianic interpolations and annotations, relatively numerous, must be recognized; the most conspicuous of these, besides the last three chapters, are 10:1-16 and 33:14-26. <sup>1</sup>.

2. The Confessions of Jeremiah.

A study of the book of Jeremiah would not be complete in any sense unless one became familiar with the so-called "Confessions of Jeremiah." These "Confessions" enable us to peer more deeply into the heart of Jeremiah than we can into that of any other prophet. These events are experiences of his inner struggle with Yahweh and his doubts when Jeremiah could not understand why Yahweh should allow certain things to take place. Jeremiah

1. G. G. Findlay, Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, pp. 436







probably wrote these "Confessions" because he felt that they had value not only for the people of his own nation but a universal value as well. An outline of these soul-struggles as given by Dr. E. A. Leslie, follows:

1. Chapter 1:18-23. The plot of the men of Anathoth against the prophet's life.
2. Chapter 12:1-3 and v. 5-6. The problem of retribution and Yahweh's challenge.
3. Chapter 15:10-18. His unmerited sufferings and his exalting joy at the prophetic word.
4. Chapter 15:19-21. Yahweh's summons to a nobler attitude of soul.
5. Chapter 17:9-10. Yahweh the comprehender of the heart.
6. Chapter 17:14-18. A prayer for solace and vengeance.
7. Chapter 18:18-23. (omitting v. 21-22a). The plot to catch him and his apologia.
8. Chapter 20:7-12. The prophetic word and untameable inner fire.
9. Chapter 20:14-18. He curses his birthday. <sup>1.</sup>

"Here, in what we call the book of Jeremiah, are set down the events, the fortunes, the thoughts, the reflections, the prayers of the man from youth to old age. And the personality of Jeremiah stands revealed. The more we know of him, the deeper our admiration, our reverence for him becomes. He is seen for what he is: one of the great, outstanding personalities of the Bible, a God-controlled, a God-inspired man." <sup>2.</sup>

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1. E. A. Leslie, Class notes in course, PROPHETS OF ISRAEL, Jan. 17, 1934.  
 2. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. xii.



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If we would thoroughly understand the prophecies of Jeremiah we need to first to gain a conception of the nature of the times in which Jeremiah lived. Unless we had this information we might well be wondering why the book of Jeremiah was ever written at all or why the prophecies of this prophet were uttered.

### 3. Historical Background

Jeremiah's life covers a period of years that marked a time in the existence of Israel in which political and social changes of extraordinary character were taking place. The position of Judah exposed it to attack from Egypt on the one side and from the eastern empire of Nineveh on the other. Judah was not strong enough to withstand either nation so sought to ally herself with one or the other. Isaiah had warned them against an alliance with Egypt. Added to these perils was the threat of invasion from the Scythian hordes, a barbarous race from near the Black Sea.

"Jeremiah came prominently forward at a serious crisis in the history of his people. The Scythian invasion of Asia, described by Herodotus (1. 103-106), but not mentioned in the biblical histories of the time, was threatening Palestine and Judea. According to the old Greek writer, Cyaxares the Mede, while engaged in besieging Nineveh, was attacked by a great horde of Scythians, under their king Madyes, who entered Asia in pushing their pursuit of the Cimmerians, whom they had expelled from Europe. The Medes lost the battle, and the barbarous victors found themselves masters of Asia. Thereupon they marched for



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Egypt, and had made their way past Ascalon, when they were met by the envoys of Psammetichus I, the king of Egypt, whose 'gifts and prayers,' induced them to return.-----For eight and twenty years the Scythians remained the tyrants of Asia, and by their exactions and plundering raids brought ruin everywhere, until at last Cyaxares and his Medes, by help of treachery, recovered their sway. After this, the Medes took Nineveh, and reduced the Assyrians to complete subjection; but Babylonia remained independent. Such is the story as related by Herodotus, our sole authority in the matter." <sup>1</sup>.

Judah was socially corrupt as well as politically unsafe. The evils which Amos attacked so vigorously in the social strata had not been corrected and there was much injustice and bickerings between the classes. The religious reform of Hezekiah's time was followed by a terrible reaction in the reign of Manasseh (II Kings 21:1-16). The country was in the midst of this reaction at the time of Jeremiah's call.

During the reign of Manasseh Israel had come under the power of Assyria and several items of the Assyrian worship had been introduced into the temple worship at Jerusalem. Then, too, Eastern colonists had settled at or near Bethel and this sanctuary was fast becoming a combination of the orthodox religion of Israel and of Assyria.

"Jeremiah's earliest preaching (chapters 2-6), and the prophecies of his contemporary Zephaniah, reveal a medley of

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1. C. J. Ball, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, pp. 12







heathen worships in Jerusalem, gross oppression and heathen worship, profligacy, insolence and insensibility characterizing both court and people." 1.

Because of these gross practices and evils that reached to the high heavens Jeremiah preached that a doom was to fall on the people. And finally Jerusalem fell and the king and the people were put into captivity by the Babylonians. Jeremiah was in prison at this time but was set free by the Babylonians who placed him under the charge of one of their men so then the prophet continued with his people, or with what was left of them in Jerusalem. It was perhaps at this period that Jeremiah produced his greatest utterance, that of the New Covenant, (chapter 31:31-34). He lived in very difficult and turbulent times, but as has often been the case with other timely leaders, these times may have had a favorable effect, moulding his character. He was confronted with grave personal problems but his was the character that enabled him to triumph over all.

Altogether, the times were surely sadly out of joint and Jeremiah was the man called to set things right. It was in a time of turmoil morally, spiritually, and politically, that Jeremiah began his ministry. No wonder he felt rather rebellious at the task which confronted him. And again no wonder that he uttered his stirring denunciations against Israel and other nations. Some have termed him the "Weeping prophet" and with just cause for he felt the sins of Israel upon his own heart. Jeremiah was the man prepared from afore time to stand up before

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Israel and call their attention not only to their sins but also to blaze the way for his people in a new life of personal relationship with Yahweh.

### 1. His Birthplace

Jeremiah was born in the little village of Anathoth, which was situated about three and a half miles north-east from Jerusalem. The year of his birth was probably 645 B.C., though some place it as early as 650. The village was placed high on the range of hills that gave the inhabitants a commanding view over the hills of Ephraim and the Jordan Valley. It is perhaps true that this country had more to do with the molding of the young life of Jeremiah than even the influence of his family.

The surrounding country of Anathoth faces the east and soon falls into the wilderness of Benjamin. From the wilderness come dangers of exposure and thirst, the waste lands around gave hiding places for lurking wolves, while in the near jungles of the Jordan the roar of lions was often heard. This kind of rugged country calls for hardy personalities of strong courage and watchful eyes. Such was the birthplace of the prophet, Jeremiah. We recall how the same environmental conditions, an open, arid landscape have characterized the birthplace and the proving ground for other prophets, such as Isaac, just a little farther south at Tekoa, and for John the Baptist, and George Adam Smith reminds us that it was this kind of territory that spread about our Lord at the time of his temptation.<sup>1</sup>

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1. George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah*, pp. 58



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## Chapter II

### The Youth and Call of Jeremiah

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The surrounding country of Anathoth faces the east and soon melts into the wilderness of Benjamin. From the wilderness came dangers of exposure and thirst, the waste lands around gave hiding places for lurking wolves, while in the near jungles of the Jordan the roar of lions was often heard. This kind of rugged country calls for hardy personalities of strong courage and watchful eyes. Such was the birthplace of the prophet, Jeremiah. We recall how the same environmental conditions, an open, arid landscape have characterized the birthplace and the proving ground for other prophets, such as Amos, just a little farther south at Tekoa, and for John the Baptist, and George Adam Smith reminds us that it was this kind of territory that spread about our Lord at the time of his temptation.<sup>1.</sup>

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1. George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, pp. 68



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Smith gives us a further description of the village and territory around it.

"It was a nursery not unfit for one, who might have been (as many think), the greatest poet of his people, had not something deeper and wider been opened to him, with which Anathoth was also in touch. The village is not more than an hour's walk from Jerusalem. Social conditions change little in the east; then, as now, the traffic between village and city was daily and close-country produce taken to the capital; pottery, salted fish, spices, and the better cloths brought back in exchange. We see how the history of Jerusalem may have influenced the boy. ----Above all, Anathoth lay within the swirl of rumor of which the capital was the centre. Jerusalem has always been a tryst of the winds." <sup>1</sup>.

Anathoth is the present little peasant village of Anata. It had been the residence of priests since the days of David. (Jeremiah 1:1; 29:27; 32:7). We cannot stress too strongly the effect and conditioning this sturdy-souled town had upon Jeremiah. This town, which was his birthplace and residence until manhood, not only contributed to the molding of his character, but also, because of its history, molded his sentiments. "Ethnologically Benjamin belonged to Israel, and the fact enables us to understand Jeremiah's undying affection for the Rachel-tribes and his longing for the home-bringing of their exiled children (3: 12f.; 31:4-6, 9, 15-20)." <sup>2</sup>. Truly his native

1. George Adam Smith, op. cit., pp. 71

2. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, pp. 19



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town had a strong influence on Jeremiah, but another influence just as strong was his home-training and ancestry.

## 2. His Ancestry.

It was previously mentioned that Anathoth was the home of priests. Jeremiah was born of a priestly family,<sup>1</sup> and it is suggested that he is a descendant of Eli. Abiathar, the last of the line of Eli to hold the office as 'Priest of the Ark', was sent into seclusion by Solomon when it was found that the priest favored the contenders of the crown over Solomon, (I Kings 2:26). Sometimes priests lived in towns near Jerusalem and came into the city only for their turn at the Temple service. "Possibly Jeremiah was a descendant of one of the priestly families of the Abiathar line, who dwelt in Anathoth and who did service at the temple in secondary position."<sup>2</sup>

But his relationship to Abiathar cannot be proved and we should not allow our imagination to carry us too far afield.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars think Abiathar had a literary gift and we should like to attribute this art to our prophet biologically but again this is mostly fancy.

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1. Kittel says, "Jeremiah was the son of a priest." Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 334. However Calkins suggests that the father of Jeremiah may or may not have been a priest himself. Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 16.

2. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 335

3. Charles Francis Potter tells us that there was a legend that Rahab, (Joshua 2:1), married Joshua. "The Jews hold her to have been the ancestress of eight famous priests and prophets (including Jeremiah, Baruch, and Ezekiel) besides the prophetess, Huldah." Story of Religion, p. 107-108.

2. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 20-21



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In the first chapter and verse of Jeremiah we read that he was the son of Hilki'ah, a Hebrew name meaning, "the Lord is my portion." This is not the Hilki'ah who found the Book of the Laws, (II Kings 22:8). The name Jeremiah, means, "whom God hurls" or "casts forth." This name is especially appropriate for the prophet with the mission he had. "Both names, Hilki'ah and Jeremiah, indicate that the family out of which Jeremiah was born was one which was loyal to the God of Israel at the time when, under Manasseh, many had lapsed from the true faith."<sup>1</sup>

We might well assume that Jeremiah was brought up in a Godly and a religious home. But not all scholars believe that his family proved to be the greatest influence in his life in the molding of his character. "----in later years our prophet's bitterest foes were they of his own household. His brethren and his father's house were in full cry after him (12:6) when the men of Anathoth sought his life because he prophesied in the name of Yahwe. It is clear therefore that Jeremiah's prophetic convictions were not shared by the family to which he belonged; and it is not improbable that on the great practical issue of the time - the law of the One Altar - he and they were on opposite sides." <sup>2</sup>

However most scholars believe that his family had a truly wholesome influence on the formative years of Jeremiah's life. He belonged to the better thinking class of people and justified his lineage magnificently. True it is that Jeremiah learned a

1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 15

2. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 20-21



In the first chapter and verse of Jeremiah we read that he was the son of Hilkiah, a Hebrew name meaning, "the Lord is my portion." This is not the Hilkiah who found the Book of the Law, (II Kings 22:8). The name Jeremiah, means, "whom God hurled" or "casts forth." This name is especially appropriate for the prophet with the mission he had. "Both names, Hilkiah and Jeremiah, indicate that the family out of which Jeremiah was born was one which was loyal to the God of Israel at the time when, under Manasseh, many had lapsed from the true faith." We might well assume that Jeremiah was brought up in a God-ly and a religious home. But not all scholars believe that his family proved to be the greatest influence in his life in the molding of his character. "----in later years our prophet's different foes were they of his own household. His brethren and his father's house were in full cry after him (12:6) when the men of Anathoth sought his life because he prophesied in the name of Yahweh. It is clear therefore that Jeremiah's prophetic convictions were not shared by the family to which he belonged; and it is not improbable that on the great practical issue of the time - the law of the One Altar - he and they were on opposite sides." S.

However most scholars believe that his family had a truly wholesome influence on the formative years of Jeremiah's life. He belonged to the better thinking class of people and justified his lineage magnificently. True it is that Jeremiah learned a



great deal from his proximity to the city of Jerusalem and from his father he learned the tales <sup>of</sup> the monarchy, and deep thoughts of Yahweh. The very fact that he comes from a priestly family insures him a fund of knowledge concerning that office.

"Nurtured, therefore, in all the lore of his family profession, secluded in the quiet hamlet of Anathoth, within easy reach of the capital, no task was too dignified for the son of such a house, no calling too divine. Viewed from a purely social standpoint, in the midst of that theocratic community, Jeremiah ranked with the aristocracy of his day, and gave place to none in social dignity and standing. In the sheltered atmosphere of his home he imbibed the culture of his people, and developed that sensitive nature which is often the apex and culmination of refinement. At any rate he belonged to the higher class of society, and he was conscious of it." <sup>1</sup>.

### 3. His Training.

We have lately discovered that a so-called self-made man does not exist. A man is the product of all he has ever read, listened to, or has seen with his eyes. His environment and friends as well as family play a large part in the education of a man. So too, with Jeremiah we shall find that he owes his character and success as a prophet to several different sources that influenced his life.

#### a. Nature .

It has already been pointed out that Jeremiah was born and spent his young manhood in the wild and rugged territory

<sup>1</sup>. T. Crouther Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 46



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### a. Nature.

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about Anathoth. The wilderness and waste lands of course affected him but he was a closer observer of nature than this. Yahweh knew and made use of this observant tendency of Jeremiah in the call of the Prophet, "Jeremiah, what seest thou?--- I see a rod of an almond-tree."

" 'with a quick, patient and observing eye he followed nature's different changeful moods,' and these were reflected in his own soul. To him a landscape is in effect a 'state of mind.' 'Jeremiah is the one instance of a prophet who traces the birth of his spiritual life to the influence of nature' (Jeremiah 1:11). Shy, sensitive, gentle and loving with beautiful poetical imagination, keen moral insight, profound religious devotion, Jeremiah must have been a unique personality even in his youth." <sup>1</sup>.

All scholars are agreed that nature and environment had a great deal to do with the molding of Jeremiah's life. In a later section on Jeremiah as the poet of nature we shall see just how great effect nature had on his imagery and figures of speech.

#### b. Influence of Jerusalem and his people.

Anathoth was just a short walk from the great city of Jerusalem. We can well imagine that this city had a peculiar attraction for the boy Jeremiah. He grew up in a country town but his duties as shepherd and farmer would often take him to the city to dispose of his wares. City life was in direct contrast to the simple life he lived in Anathoth. So the boy's

1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 18-19  
(after Julius A. Bewer, Literature of the Old Testament,  
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mind would undoubtedly ponder over the luxuries, ease, and apparent immorality of the city. Then, too, in the city of Jerusalem he would hear the latest gossip and rumors of invasions or fears that confronted the people. "We see how the history of Jerusalem may have influenced the boy. Solomon's Temple was nearly four hundred years old. There were the city walls, some of them still older, the Palace and the Tombs of the Kings - perhaps also access to the written rolls of chroniclers and prophets." <sup>1</sup>. All of these, not to mention foreigners, traders etc. that he would meet, must have had an influence on the youth's mind.

Jeremiah lived in a small town but he was not a hermit. First of all he received a vast store of information and inspiration from his father. Then, too, his neighbors in the priestly town of Anathoth must have imparted tales of earlier days to the youth. "The boy grew up with many ghosts about him." <sup>2</sup>. He was told stories of the monarchy, tales of conquest and failure of the nation, and above all stories of Yahweh and his revelation.

#### c. Hebrew Literature .

Jeremiah did not have to depend only on verbal tradition for his information of the past centuries but he could also search the written rolls and literature existing in his time. Probably most of these were fragmentary but they were sufficient to stir the imagination of Jeremiah and to reveal to him the glorious events of by gone days. Professor Elmer A. Leslie enumerates

1. George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, p. 71

2. George Adam Smith, ibid, p. 70

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1. George Adam Smith, *Jeremiah*, p. VI  
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the fragments and rolls existing in the time of Jeremiah and to which he might have had access.

#### Fragments of O. T. Literature before 1000 B. C.

Song of Lamech, Gen. 4:23-24  
 Song of Miriam, Ex. 15:21  
 The Ritual of the Ark, Num. 10:35 f.  
 The Oath Concerning Amalek, Ex. 17:16  
 The Song of Satire on the Amorites, Num. 21:27-30  
 The Song of the Well, Num. 21:17f.  
 A Fragmentary Station List from the Book of the Wars of Jehovah, Num. 21:14f.  
 A Fragment from the Book of Jashar, Josh. 10:12f.  
 The Song of Deborah, Judges 5.  
 A Proverb "of the ancients" quoted by David, I Sam. 24:13  
 Two Riddles and a Triumph Song of Samson, Judges 14:14, 18; 15:16  
 The Fable of Jotham, Judges 9:7-15  
 The Curse and Blessing of Noah, Gen. 9:25-27  
 The Blessing (a summary of tribal history) of Jacob, Gen. 49  
 The Oracles of Balaam, the Seer, Num. 23, 24

#### Fragments of O. T. Literature from the Times of David and Solomon.

A Song celebrating the prowess of David, I Sam. 18:7, 21:11, 29:5  
 The Benjamite Battle Cry, II Sam. 20:1  
 David's Lament over Abner, II Sam. 3:33f.  
 The Parable of Nathan, II Sam. 12:1-4  
 The Blessing (a summary of tribal history) of Moses, Deut. 33  
 The Book of the Wars of Jehovah  
 The Book of Jashar (of the Valiant?)  
 The Early strand of narrative in Samuel (I Sam. 9, etc.)  
 The Court History of David, II Sam. 9 to I Kings 2  
 The Book of the Acts of Solomon  
 The Kernel of the Temple narratives  
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#### O. T. Literature of the Eighth Century B. C.

Continuation of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel  
 Continuation of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah  
 The E Document, about 750 B.C.  
 The Writings of Amos  
 The Writings of Hosea  
 The Writings of Isaiah 1-39 (excluding 24-27, 13:1-14:23, 21, 34, 35)  
 The Writings of Micah, 725-690 B.C. <sup>1</sup>.

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From this formidable array of fragments Jeremiah would have learned enough about his nation and its relationship with Yahweh to fire his zeal and to excite his wonder. "Apparently Jeremiah, so far as human means went, was prepared for his work, not by any formal training in the schools of the prophets, but by the instruction and associations which he would have in Anathoth. In particular the discovery of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah, which took place a few years after Jeremiah's call, doubtless made much stir at his native town, as we know that it did in Jerusalem, including, as it must have done, those graphic pictures which stand in Deuteronomy 28 of the punishments which were to follow neglect of God and lapse into idolatry." <sup>1</sup>. We know this document made a deep impression on Jeremiah because he makes so many references to it in his prophecies. How could his people be so wayward in the face of a long-suffering and just God? But in Hosea he found a friend who thought as he did and in a large sense, suffered as he did.

"His (Jeremiah's) familiarity with the ideas of the older prophets, especially with those of Hosea, appears so soon after his call, and that call came to him so early in life, that we may safely assume that he had known the prophetic writings and assimilated the principles of their teaching before he had reached the age of manhood. In Hosea he found not only a teacher, but a spirit kindred to his own. Both were men of exceptionally tender and emotional temperament, sympathising intensely

2. John Skinner, 1930, p. 23

1. A. W. Streane, Jeremiah and Lamentations (Cambridge Bible)  
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with the people on which they were constrained to pour out the vials of divine judgment;----"1.

We often discover verses and figures of speech in Jeremiah that we know belong to Hosea originally. But Jeremiah seems to have studied this prophet so thoroughly and the two were so closely attuned that Hosea's thoughts were his thoughts. (cf. Jer. 2:1f. and 16:1f.) "What Hosea had learned through the bitter experiences of his home life led Jeremiah early to renounce the hope of marriage, because he felt himself to be like his predecessor the prophet of a nation's dying agony. They are the two martyr prophets of the Old Testament, men of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the most deeply exercised in spiritual religion of all the prophets of Israel." 2.

#### d. Meditation.

Jeremiah was a thoughtful observant man. He not only saw with his eyes but he understood with his mind, or if the problem was difficult he pondered over it until he reached a plausible explanation. Jeremiah was often alone and in his solitude his only companion was his thoughts. He no doubt indulged in long periods of meditation in which he pondered over new events, new sights and revelations until they were no longer new to him but became a part of the man. "Jeremiah reflected upon what he received. God and his commission became the object of his reflections. He himself observed, examined, and came to a decision."3.

1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 21

2. John Skinner, *ibid*, p. 22

3. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 339



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Jeremiah's meditations were to become the heart of his personal relationship to Yahweh.

#### 4. His Call

Jeremiah's call came at a time of national danger at the hands of the Scythian hordes that were pressing toward Jerusalem. The generally accepted date for the call of Jeremiah is 626 B.C.<sup>1</sup> In Jeremiah 1:2, he tells us that he first received his commission in the thirteenth year of the king Josiah.

Josiah began his reign in 638 B.C. and this would make the date 626 B.C. approximately correct.

There is much discussion over the age of Jeremiah when he received his call. In 1:6 he implies that he is only a child, a mere youth. But the Hebrew word na'ar here translated as child or youth is used to denote any age from birth to middle age. So many scholars believe that Jeremiah must have been at least twenty-five when he was called to his ministry. But Skinner argues, convincingly it seems, that he was younger than this.

"Considering that Jeremiah was unmarried, that his renunciation of married life was a consequence of his vocation (16:1) and that early marriages are the rule among Orientals, it is quite probable that he was under 20 when the call came to him."<sup>2</sup>

##### a. The Task and his acceptance of it.

When Yahweh told him that he was to have charge over the nations, and Jeremiah sensed the greatness of his task he was

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overwhelmed. "Already there begins the struggle between the implanted word of Jehovah and the nature of the man, on which turns Jeremiah's inner history and the development of his heroic character,-----all things considered, the noblest in the O. T. His ministry was to be a long martyrdom." <sup>1</sup>.

We have mentioned the strength of Jeremiah's character in this paper and we may wonder why the prophet rebelled against this call when it came to him. He rebelled because the task seemed greater than he could bear, there were other things he had in mind for his own life perhaps. "He did not choose his profession, he recoiled from it; but he was thrust into the arena of public life by an impulse which he could not resist."<sup>2</sup>.

But when we consider his youth, and the impossible obstacles that he knew he would have to confront and master, we cannot wonder at his hesitancy in accepting the call. True, Yahweh promised him the protection of his spirit and name, (1:8, 9), but even then the task would be no light thing and Jeremiah knew there would be plenty of perils. Thorne summarizes the dangers and agonies which Jeremiah came to know in his ministry.

"The task to which Jeremiah was called was one in which he would need all the resources of divine equipment and protection. The promise given to him, however, was adequate to all demands, and his forty-four years' career was one long fulfillment of it. He was indeed made a 'defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls, against the whole land.' (Jer. 1:18). Assailed

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1. James Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible, p. 434

2. John Edgar McFadyen, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 143



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 2. John Edgar McRay, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 143



by kings and princes, prophets, priests, and people, without companionship of wife or child, he stood alone. His life was in constant peril; his heart quaked for fear; his agony became so great that he cursed the day in which he was born. Nevertheless, he remained faithful; grace triumphed over nature, and transformed this frail, timid man into a hero of the supreme type. It is an astonishing instance of 'strength made perfect in weakness.' 1.

Who would not shrink from an array of evils like the above? But our prophet, after only a short reflection of these discomforts, seems to realize that Yahweh knew best so acknowledges his life to be in the hands of God to do with as he chooses. "We cannot but feel that though this may have been Jeremiah's first vision of Yahweh it was not the beginning of his fellowship with Him. It is the consummation of a genuine religious experience, rooted probably in the pieties of home and early life, of a growing self-knowledge and knowledge of God, which now ripens into the consciousness of a special mission." 2. Jeremiah thought himself unprepared but his simple meditative life was a far better preparation than he knew. Yahweh chooses his men because of character, not reputation. The strong Christ-like ministry of Jeremiah shows that, in this case, Yahweh chose wisely.

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### b. The Nature of His Call

Jeremiah's call did not differ in essence from that of the other prophets. <sup>1</sup> Behind it was the need for a man, a man who would be subject to the laws of Yahweh and have an exalted vision of his message. In this regard Jeremiah excelled all the others. "None of his predecessors, so far as we know, had entertained so exalted an idea of his mission." <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah felt that his call was a worthy one and so real that he felt the very presence of Yahweh.

In chapter one which gives us the story of his call we note the following elements. <sup>3</sup> First, the fact of his youth, then his consciousness of his call in that it was from and even before his birth, (v. 4). Next we see his hesitant nature, loath to take up so great a responsibility. There is also his commission to and above the nations. Some scholars believe this should read 'nation' rather than 'nations.' However, Welch gives an enlightening interpretation of this verse.

"Jeremiah is commissioned to utter the divine words (v. 9). These, in the thought of the prophet, contain the absolute standards of all right conduct, and therefore determine the fate, not of Israel alone, but of all nations." <sup>4</sup>

With the commission to the nations we note a peculiar sensitiveness of Jeremiah's part to the presence of Yahweh, he was

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, see p. 58

2. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 28

3. See Graduate Course No. II, Lesson IV, p. 3 and 4,  
Commission on Courses of Study of the Methodist Church

4. Adam C. Welch, "Jeremiah" in Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 680







vividly conscious of it. Verse 10 denotes that the call was to be both positive and negative in its nature, 'To pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' We also perceive the struggle in his soul which is between his own desires and inclination and the will of God and his duty toward Him. Lastly, we see that his message is to be one of doom. A messenger of doom to the nation and to the people he loved. Verse 18 literally comes true: "For behold, I have made thee this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land."

This entire revelation takes place in the form of a dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. One thing to be noticed is the extreme simplicity of the vision, if vision it was, in comparison with the calls of other prophets. Compare the grandiose visions of Ezekiel and the holy conception received by Isaiah. Then too, Isaiah volunteered immediately while Jeremiah drew back. But the sincerity or piety of Isaiah never surpassed that of Jeremiah after Jeremiah had accepted his commission. "He might hesitate, but he must obey. For him now his own word was God's word, and God's word was power and truth. Such was the dreadful greatness of his office that he now felt he had the power to give nations and empires their fate - such a fate! More than once his tender heart felt it must break under the burden." <sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah's call was, for him, a great religious experience. It was a simple but extremely vivid revelation of God and his will to the thinking religious man of Anathoth. His vision was

1. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 336



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I. Rudolf Kistel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 356



simple but Real. "Here are no cherubim or seraphim, as in the case of Isaiah. Here are no visions of chariots and wheels as in the case of Ezekiel. Here is direct contact between God and the soul of Jeremiah. Here is immediate and indubitable experience of God. Here is Reality of the most solid sort imaginable." <sup>1</sup>.

### c. The Two Visions .

Jeremiah could say that his mother had dedicated him to the prophetic office before he was born (v. 5). The first ten verses of chapter one tell us of his personal call to that office and the following verses depict two supplementary visions connected with his call. These may have taken place immediately after his first commission or a short time afterwards when Jeremiah may have been walking in the lonely fields of Anathoth brooding over the former revelation from Yahweh when suddenly these two new revelations break forth into his consciousness.

The first vision (v. 11), is characteristic of Jeremiah in that it shows his observant nature and ability to sense the will of God. Jeremiah saw an almond tree "shaqedh," which is the first of the plants to come to life in the spring. The word is used in the Hebrew to mean "wakefulness" or "awake." "It was a sudden and startling reminder that in the midst of that wintry landscape, God was alive and God was at work." <sup>2</sup>. This common tree returning to life after its dormant state through the winter burst on the sight of Jeremiah with its

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 59

2. Raymond Calkins, *ibid*, p. 63



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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 59

2. Raymond Calkins, Ibid, p. 62



meaning much as the vision of the "burning bush" did to Moses centuries before. And like Moses "----in the strength of that vision, Jeremiah went forth to obey God's call and to attempt, in cooperation with His omnipotent strength, what had seemed to him to be an impossible task." <sup>1</sup>.

The second vision mentioned in verse 13 may have been enacted only in the prophet's mind but more probably Jeremiah saw a boiling pot on some domestic hearth, "----and he seems to notice - what he would scarcely have noticed if his mind had not been preoccupied with the idea - that its mouth is turned away from the north." <sup>2</sup>. The meaning of this verse or vision is that Jeremiah saw a boiling pot or caldron which was blown upon from the north by a strong wind. This wind exemplifies the danger which is to come upon Judah from the north and that danger takes shape in the form of the dreaded Scythians and Babylonians.

A comparison of these two visions exemplify the contrast and struggle in Jeremiah's inner nature. His first vision shows his love of nature and beauty, the second illustrates the unwelcome message he is to deliver. "On the one hand, he is a simple and sensitive lover of all beautiful things in which his poetical nature reads the love of God. On the other hand, his is the terrible mission of denouncing the religious apostasy of the people whom he loves, and prophesying that the mighty heathen nations

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1. Raymond Calkins, op. cit. p. 63-64

2. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 31



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of the North are to be the instruments of God to bring down upon the people the punishment which they justly deserve." <sup>1</sup>.

One more thing needs to be pointed out in the call of Jeremiah. He had a personal relationship with Yahweh such as no other prophet experienced in his call. In this regard we generally think of Isaiah, who, with his grand vision of Yahweh overshadows our own ability to grasp or imagine the greatness and grandeur of God. But here we need to recall that whereas Isaiah received the purging of his "unclean lips" from an angel, our prophet, Jeremiah, received his purging and commission on his lips directly from the hand of God, Himself. "Then Jehovah put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and Jehovah said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth:" (v.9). Jeremiah's call was no unexpected event; he had been preparing himself for just some kind of work in his humble daily tasks.

"Jeremiah's call is more of the nature of a spiritual birth, in which the gracious influences of bygone years come to their fruition. As he walked through the fields of Anathoth in quiet communion with his God, the meaning and purpose of his life lay suddenly unveiled before him; and with a full sense of responsibility he accepted the Divine commission, and went forth as Jahweh's prophet to the nations." <sup>2</sup>.

1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 65

2. Alex R. Gordon, The Prophets of the Old Testament, p. 151-152



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### Chapter III

#### His Prophetic Ministry

Jeremiah is one of the most important prophets of the Old Testament. This is a conservative statement and we shall see this when we consider the length of time covered by this prophet's life and his ministry. In this chapter, our purpose is to point out the high lights of his long ministry from a historical standpoint and in a chronological order. His prophetic activity covers forty years of an important period in the history of Israel in what Calkins calls, "The Decline and Fall of the Hebrew Nation." <sup>1</sup>. These catastrophic years no doubt had something to do with the molding of his character but after all we must admit that above this period the personality of Jeremiah shines out like a full moon on a clear night.

##### 1. 626 B. C. His Call.

We have already considered this phase of the prophet's life at some length. Here we need only to recall that this was a significant year if for no other reason than the fact that he began his ministry. The great King Ashurbanipal died at the same time of Jeremiah's call and this marked the beginning of the downfall of Assyria. Babylon now comes into the spotlight as a world power. The Scythians made great inroads

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on Assyria and threatened Palestine but never reached the Southern Kingdom.

Previous to this time Hezekiah, king of Judah, had been asked by Babylon and Egypt to revolt against the Assyrian power. Isaiah warned them not to do this and said that some day the Israelites would fall into the clutches of the Babylonians. Hezekiah was a loyal man of God and did all he could to restore the pure worship of Yahweh but the people were insistent that a revolt take place so Sennacherib sent an army to besiege Jerusalem but returned to Assyria without destroying the city. The prophet Isaiah did yeoman service in preventing panic in Jerusalem and surrender to the army of Sennacherib. Jeremiah was to play a similar role in protecting Israel but was to do so by entreating surrender to Babylon rather than defiance.

At the time of Jeremiah's call we find the seeds sown for the decay of Assyria and also the danger of a Scythian invasion against Israel as well as the rapidly growing power of Babylon looming on the horizon. He was called to be the judge of nations in a most important phase of world history. "A tremendous, indeed for him, even a really uncanny commission: To uproot and to build up kingdoms! What wonder that the young man trembled and hesitated. But it was Yahweh's hand that came upon him, his word that commanded and compelled him to act." <sup>1</sup>.

## 2. 621 B.C. The New Law Book Discovered.

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repairs were being made on the temple by Josiah's command, a scroll was found which was to make a deep impression on the King and to some extent on the people. This was the Book of the Law and consisted of, what is practically, the book of Deuteronomy. Hilkiah the priest found this portion or original Book of the Law and it was read to the king who determined a national religious revival. This reform was widespread and sincere on his part.

"Its requirements were at once put into force; the high-places in and outside of Jerusalem were demolished; the Asherah, the symbolic post or mast standing in front of the altar, was cut down and burned; the teraphim and idols, apparently figures or representations of the divinity, were removed; the emblems of stellar worship, the sun chariot, were taken away; the high-places of the "satyrs" (instead of "gates") were broken; Moloch worship was made to cease; the houses of sacred prostitution, where the women made garments wherein to perform the immoral rites of Astarte, were broken down; the cults of spiritism and augury were done away with; the priests associated with the illegal cults were deposed or made an inferior class in the temple service; the altars of foreign workmanship of Ahaz and Manasseh were broken down; and, finally, best of all, the Passover was kept according to the strict requirements of the newly found Law book, in a way unknown before in Hebrew history. The reformation described with such detail, was for the time being, evidently thoroughgoing, and it must have produced much religious exultation among the faithful." 1.

1. Ismar J. Peritz, Old Testament History, p. 206



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It would seem that such a reform must soon sweep over the whole of Israel and accomplish much good and this was true. However, it was not as successful in the final analysis as would at first be suspected. The reform had one serious defect. "This reform (1) centralized worship at Jerusalem, (2) it tried to make the principles of the eighth century prophets practical by embodying them in laws, and (3) it had a tendency to make religion a matter of a book, of legal observance, and to shift the emphasis from the free spirit to something more objective."<sup>1</sup>.

So when we consider that this reform led finally to a more legalistic and literalistic form of religion we will realize that after all, the reform was not such a great help to Jeremiah who emphasized the personal, rather than the legal relationship with Yahweh.

### 3. 608 B.C. Josiah dies at Megiddo.

Evidently Jeremiah had nothing, or at least very little, to do with the reform instituted in 621 B.C. We surmise this because we have no record of his being called or consulted in the matter by the King, Josiah. Evidently the first few years after his call to the prophetic office were spent quietly at home in Anathoth or he would have been heard of before.

Some scholars have commented much on the fact that Jeremiah and Josiah were very nearly of the same age and since they lived so close together they certainly must have known each other more or less intimately. But this is mostly guess-work

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1. Clyde E. Wildman, in Graduate Course No. II, Lesson I, p. 4  
Commission on Courses of Study of the Methodist Episcopal Church



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This was something that the people of Israel could not understand. The nation had been closely following the laws of Yahweh as found in the Book of the Law. For years this reform had been kept and the entire nation was striving to worship the one true God when the catastrophe came, the death of Josiah at Megiddo. The difficulty was to explain why Yahweh, if he had to punish the nation for its wickedness, had not brought this punishment to pass in the time of the wicked reign of Manasseh when the entire nation was given over to vice and corruption as well as idolatry. In the time of the reform the national hopes and aspirations had risen to great heights only to feel more poignantly this crushing defeat.

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"The hopes of Judah rested upon a worldly foundation; and it was necessary that a people whose blindness was only intensified by prosperity, should be undeceived by the discipline



of overthrow.-----And the agony of this irretrievable disaster, this sudden and complete extinction of his country's fairest hopes, may have been the means by which the Holy Spirit led Jeremiah to an intenser conviction that illicit modes of worship and coarse idolatries were not the only things in Judah offensive to Iahvah." 1.

The above quotation suggests, that the death of Josiah at Megiddo with its unanswerable question of why Yahweh so visited a people worshipping him as best they could, may have driven Jeremiah to seek an answer and that answer he later found in his New Covenant of a personal relationship with Yahweh. This would tend then, to be a good result from a national calamity and evil. Eiselen, on the other hand suggests that this misfortune resulted in more hardship and inertia for Jeremiah to overcome on the part of the people. "The death of Josiah, in 608, was a severe blow to the immediate realization of the ideals of the prophets. The anti-Yahweh party, which had been in the background for some years, hastened to point to the calamity as a divine judgment upon the king's iconoclastic zeal to change old customs and practices." 2.

The least we can say is that this tragedy, a major one in the sight of the nation, compelled Jeremiah to answer the problem of suffering to the satisfaction of the people as well as to continue his regular duty of prophesying in the name of Yahweh.

1. C. J. Ball, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 20-21

2. Frederick Carl Eiselen, The Prophetic Books of the Old Testament, Vol. I, p. 304



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#### 4. 604 B.C. The Writing of the First Roll.

This was or is an important date for us today because it gave us the first edition of a portion of the great Book of Jeremiah. The prophet had been prophesying for over twenty years when he decided that he ought to write down his prophecies. Perhaps too, he felt that when his scribe Baruch would read the scroll in public that his word, the word of Yahweh, would have more effect than the spoken word seems to have previously had. A day was chosen when the people were gathered together in Jerusalem at a feast of penance for the reading of the scroll. This scroll consisted of many of the prophecies given by Jeremiah and were dictated to Baruch.

This was an important date in the life of Jeremiah for this was the beginning of his literary career which is appreciated by students and is the envy of writers today. Jeremiah was a worthy writer and poet as well as one of the very greatest of the great prophets.

#### 5. 597 B.C. The First Deportation to Babylon.

Following the death and defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, Judah was placed under the control of Egypt who demanded the payment of a heavy tribute each year. Jehoahaz followed his father, Josiah, on the throne of Judah, but after three months was deposed by Pharaoh-Necho who put Josiah's other son, Jehoiakim, on the throne. Jehoiakim ruled from 608-597 B. C. and seemed quite content to remain loyal to Egypt. But Judah fell under the power of Babylon which demanded tribute of Judah and which led the populace to clamor for rebellion against Babylon even though Jeremiah did all he could to prevent this from taking place.



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This was or is an important date for us today because it gave us the first edition of a portion of the great Book of Jeremiah. The prophet had been prophesying for over twenty years when he decided that he ought to write down his prophecies. Perhaps too, he felt that when his scribe Baruch would read the scroll in public that his words, the word of Yahweh, would have more effect than the spoken word seems to have previously had. A day was chosen when the people were gathered together in Jerusalem at a feast of penance for the reading of the scroll. This scroll consisted of many of the prophecies given by Jeremiah and were dictated to Baruch.

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#### 5. 597 B.C. The First Deportation to Babylon.

Following the death and defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, Judah was placed under the control of Egypt who demanded the payment of a heavy tribute each year. Jehoshaphat followed his father, Josiah, on the throne of Judah, but after three months was deposed by Pharaoh-Necho who put Josiah's other son, Jeholashim, on the throne. Jeholashim ruled from 608-597 B.C. and seemed quite content to remain loyal to Egypt. But Judah fell under the power of Babylon which demanded tribute of Judah and which led the populace to clamor for rebellion against Babylon even though Jeremiah did all he could to prevent this from taking place.



The patriotic Jeremiah no doubt writhed at the thought of his people being subject to any nation but he was clear sighted enough to realize that Babylon was the lesser of the two evils in comparison with Egypt if Judah did not rebell against Babylon. The proper thing for Judah to have done at this time would have been to rest quietly in the protection of Babylon and to grow strong politically within and this is what Jeremiah tried to tell them. He saw in Babylon the appointed hand of God and knew it would be useless for the people to rebell, but rebell they did.

Because of this rebellion Nebuchadrezzar brought siege against Jerusalem and captured it.<sup>1</sup> In the meanwhile, Jehoiakim died and Jehoaichin succeeded him but only to rule for three months, when Jerusalem fell to the attack of Babylon in 597 B. C. and Jehoiachin with the royal household, and nobles, and also seven thousand of the artisan class of Judah were taken into captivity. Zedekiah was now placed on the throne of Judah.

These changing times were also a time of trouble and activity for the prophet, Jeremiah. He found a strong opponent in the person of King Jehoiakim and these two men were ever unreconciled in regard to the policies of the nation. "It was a spiritual duel which for force and passion transcends that between Luther and the German Emperor, or between John Knox and Mary, Queen of Scots. It was not easy to be a prophet even in

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1. II Kings 24:10-17



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Josiah's time. But with Jehoiakim, Manasseh had come to life again." <sup>1</sup>.

As previously mentioned, when Josiah died at Megiddo, the anti-Yahweh party rose in power. From the very moment Jehoiakim ascended the throne Jeremiah's fight for reform was increased and took on dangers and a significance not before known. It is a wonder that the prophet ever lived through these hectic years for he was persecuted and imprisoned time after time but some how Yahweh looks after his own, as he had promised (1:8).

All through the terrible years of Jehoiakim's reign Jeremiah had been prophesying and carrying out dramatic episodes in order to impress on the people their need for reform but with little success. He preached denunciatory sermons in the temple and was only saved from death because he was so filled with the power of his message that the princes and the people decided, -- 'this man is not worthy of death for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord, our God.' (26:14-16).

But even these were not effective so Jeremiah conceived the idea of writing down his prophecies and having Baruch read them to the public in the hope that the read word would carry more power with them than the same words spoken. But again Jehoiakim steps in and cuts and burns the scroll that Jeremiah had hoped would convert the people. But in the deportation of the Judean leaders to Babylon, Jeremiah sees still more clearly

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 23



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6. 586 B.C. Jerusalem captured and burnt by the Chaldaeans. Jews carried to Babylon.

Zedekiah follows Jehoiachin on the Judean throne and though he was a believer in Jeremiah and his principles still he was such a weak man individually that he had not the strength of his convictions. In the first place we note that he was king over the poorer element in Judah because the most energetic and loyal nationalists had been carried away in the captivity of 597 B.C. Those remaining in Judah still clung to the hope that Babylon might somehow fall into the clutches of some other power which would give the Jews their freedom. These men kept coaxing Zedekiah to join with Egypt against Babylon.

Jeremiah however was loyal to Babylon for he recognized this as the will of God and because he preached loyalty to this nation he was considered to be a traitor by many of his people. The people persuaded the weak king to arrest Jeremiah and when the prophet would not cease his claims that they should submit to Babylonian rule, he was put into a dungeon and was saved from death only because of the importunities of an Ethiopian servant who persuaded the king to release Jeremiah (38:6-13). Jeremiah continued his attack on the false-nationalists in the form of his vision of two baskets of figs. The basket of good figs he represents as the good people of the land who had been carried off, captives into Babylon, the other one of poor figs he represents as the untrustworthy character of the people remaining



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in Judah. By means of wearing a yoke he tried to show his people that they should subject themselves to the rule of Babylon. In almost every conceivable way Jeremiah persuades his people to trust in Yahweh and to accept the punishment he has visited upon them.

The prophet also writes a letter <sup>1.</sup> to the captives in Babylon asking them to build houses for themselves there and prepare to settle down and raise families in this foreign land. This was indeed a new approach in their thought of religion to the Jews. They had always thought that only in Jerusalem and their native land could they adequately serve Yahweh. "By it (his plea for the captives to settle down in Babylon) Jeremiah became the father of religious cosmopolitanism, of the conception that religion is supernational. A citizen has a fatherland; religion has none. The world belongs to religion." <sup>2.</sup> This is one of the great contributions that Jeremiah has made to religious thought.

But Zedekiah listened to short-sighted men and decided to rebell against the Babylonian power. Nebuchadrezzar immediately sent his army to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem which was well fortified and could possibly withstand a siege of a year and a half. At the beginning of the siege, Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah, asking him what the result of the siege would be. Jeremiah advises immediate surrender and says that those giving themselves up shall live but otherwise they shall die by famine and pestilence (21:9). It would seem that Zedekiah would have

1. Jeremiah 29:1-20

2. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 361



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liked to have followed the prophet's advice but feared the wrath of his people who had already given themselves over to the besiegers, so the siege went on.

The Chaldaeans were forced to raise the siege for a short time while they engaged an army from Egypt that came to relieve Jerusalem. Before this time the people of Jerusalem had set their slaves free as an act of repentance but when the attacking army withdrew to fight the Egyptian army the people again forced their former slaves into servitude. This shows the superficiality of the people that Jeremiah was trying to save and he flays them for their perfidy.

But it was too late, the damage was done, and Jerusalem fell again, this time to be burnt by fire. The king, Zedekiah was captured and his sons put to death before his eyes, the last sight he was to see for his eyes were put out and he was taken captive to Babylon. Shortly afterwards his people were sent into exile and the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed.

#### 7. Flight into Egypt and the end of Jeremiah's life.

Nebuchadrezzar appointed Gedaliah, governor over the few poor people remaining in the city of Jerusalem. He was a good and noble man and a friend to Jeremiah and believed that the prophet was a true prophet of Yahweh. At first conditions in Jerusalem seemed better than they had for a long time and peace seemed finally to have arrived for the few people remaining. But the Ammonites instigated a conspiracy under Ishmael and Gedaliah was foully murdered. The Jews were in a panic because of this and wished to flee to Egypt and urged Jeremiah to come



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with them but the prophet chose to remain in the city. When Jerusalem fell Jeremiah had been given the privilege of going to Babylon under the king's protection or of staying in Jerusalem. Now after the death of Gedaliah the people forced Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them into Egypt in order to escape the wrath of the Babylonian king.

In Egypt, the prophet continued his preaching for a change of heart and this kind of admonition was greatly needed for the Jews had decided that Yahweh was unjust to them by permitting all of the calamities of the previous years so the people turned to worship other gods in the hope that their ill-fated luck would be changed and that prosperity would be theirs. "They believed that all the misfortune that came upon them resulted from Josiah's removal of the foreign gods. Thus they returned to their old practices, as Manasseh and Jehoiakim had done, and hoped for good fortune in the future."<sup>1</sup> The Jews had little love for Jeremiah's preaching in Egypt. This preaching attacked and condemned their new heathenish practices so he was denied fellowship with them and was persecuted almost as bitterly in Egypt as he had been in Jerusalem. His struggle at the beginning of his ministry was one against idolatry and unfaithfulness to Yahweh and this was to be his fight again in Egypt as an old man.

"So we leave Jeremiah, an exile in a strange land, surrounded by his own people who have refused to learn anything from their tragic experiences and resent all efforts on his part to

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"So we leave Jeremiah, an exile in a strange land, surrounded by his own people who have refused to learn anything from their tragic experiences and resent all efforts on his part to



teach them. He is a homeless, helpless, solitary soul---an idealist in the midst of a materialistic generation. He had lost everything, property, home, country, and hope--everything but his own soul. He was misunderstood, unappreciated, persecuted, and imprisoned by his contemporaries, only to be taken up by history and given the place of honor in the goodly fellowship of the prophets." <sup>1</sup>.

Thus we have traced the high lights of our prophet's career and have seen how he was persecuted and even despised by his fellowmen. He who was the greatest patriot of them all was condemned as being unpatriotic, he who was the most spiritual of all the prophets in his own time was termed a false prophet. We do not know how he died but tradition says that his own countrymen put him to death <sup>2</sup>. for his unwelcome prophecies. But this we know, that he had been a true and valiant soldier of God and died knowing his work was done and that other saints would later rise to carry on the torch he had held high.

These objective facts of the prophetic life of Jeremiah give us a practical knowledge of the man himself. After all a man is generally known by what he does. It is true that his successes and failures do not always reveal his character, but it is also true that the ideal held by him through both success and failure, honor and humiliation, reveal the inner character and spirit of a man better than any other criterion we have.

<sup>1</sup>. J. M. Powis Smith, The Prophets and Their Times, p. 160

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In the life of the prophet Jeremiah we found much public humiliation and disgrace. But his spirit triumphed over these because his ideal, his belief in God and his intimate relation to Him, were such as to give him a sense of personal victory in the face of public ridicule and humiliation.

The times frequently make the man but a strong man helps to make his own times. Jeremiah had much to do with the molding of the history of his day. Because he entered into the troublesome times of his own day and analysed them so successfully, his spirit was felt then and was destined to transcend time. The spirit and motivating ideal of Jeremiah live today as when he faithfully expounded the word of God by both word and deed.



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## Chapter IV

### Prophecy and its Development

#### 1. The History and Nature of Prophecy.

Jeremiah was a prophet and we need to know something about the prophetic office and its history if we would learn to know the motives and customs that made Jeremiah to know that he was a prophet of the living God. He was not a separate individual but one in a group of prophets, not the originator of divine revelation in man but one of several men through the years who felt the message of Yahweh and could not be silent.

"Prophecy was a recognized institution in Israel. It was not simply an office to which a few persons were called; it was an established order, somewhat akin to that of the priesthood. The priests, prophets, and "wise men" formed in a sense the three learned professions of the ancient Hebrews.----to understand the one we need to know something about the other two." <sup>1</sup>.

In this review of the history of prophecy we shall discover the way in which these different phases of early prophecy or revelation contributed to the established order of the prophets in later years.

##### a. The Prophet.

The word prophecy probably first brings up in the mind of the reader the idea of a foretelling of the future. Of course this was one function of the prophetic group but the main

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1. Albert C. Knudson, The Prophetic Movement in Israel, p. 11



# Prophecy and the Development

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Prophecy was a recognized institution in Israel. It was not simply an office to which a few persons were called; it was an established order, somewhat similar to that of the priesthood. The prophet, priest, and "seer" formed the religious leadership of the nation. The prophet was the one who spoke the word of Yahweh to the people. He was the one who was to know something about the "two."

In this review of the history of prophecy we shall discuss in the way in which these different phases of early prophecy or revelation contributed to the established order of the prophetic in later years.

## 2. The Prophet

The word prophet probably first came up in the mind of the reader the idea of a foretelling of the future. Of course this was one function of the prophetic group but the main



message of the prophet was due to a mediation between God and man rather than a prediction. The distinction of their lives was not their predictions but rather their revelation of the divine character and will in such a way that it forms the basis of our faith. They were preachers as well as wise men.

"It (prophecy) was a rational institution. Its teaching was self-consistent, coherent, and constructive. It presented to the world - and did so for the first time - a unitary conception of things, a wonderful philosophy of life and history, which has made such a permanent and powerful appeal to the human heart and intellect as to carry with it the conviction that it came not from man but from God." 1.

We have seen that the priest was primarily concerned with the church and the wise man with the individual but we may see here that the prophet was not only concerned with the salvation of the individual but with the salvation of the nation and that with this in view he therefore attempted the transformation of society. The priest and the wise man were content with handing down tradition and custom but the prophet often overruled custom and blazed a new spiritual trail for all to follow.

The prophet was not born to his task nor was he always chosen by virtue of his personal fitness as the wise man but the prophet received the title of his office by means of a divine call. This meant that any and all were eligible to this call but it also shows that only those best fitted in a spiritual sense were so called. It was the mission of the prophet

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to communicate to Israel the divine word. It was in this capacity and because of his own religious character that Jeremiah was called.

## 2. Steps in the Development of the Prophetic Movement,

The student needs to remind himself that the prophets as revealed in their books in the Old Testament were not the originators of the prophetic movement. In other words, the prophet did not happen all at once, in full bloom. Before we come to the time of the prophet as generally understood, we find that there were steps leading up to this time in a more or less gradual development. Dr. Leslie suggests five distinct steps in this development.<sup>1</sup>

### a. Moses ,

The first step is to be found in the person of Moses. Of course there were, no doubt, other evidences of a prophetic nature before him but since it was he who gave the Israelites the power to refer to themselves as a nation he was given the title of the first prophet of Israel. He is called a prophet in Hosea 12:13, and also in Deuteronomy 18:15. But in classing him with the preliterate prophets we are not giving him his true office which was the liberator of Israel.

"In Exodus 34:6-7, we read a prophetic conception of God as given to us by this prophet. 'Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth; keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'"

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1. Elmer A. Leslie Class notes in the Course, PROPHETS OF ISRAEL, Sept. 1934, Boston University School of Theology.



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### b. The Appearance of the Seer.

We know little concerning the nature of prophecy during the time from Moses to Samuel, the seer. But besides Moses, the term, prophet, is applied to Abraham, Aaron, Eldad and Medad, Miriam, and next, to Samuel. The description given in I Samuel 3:1 seems to indicate the nature of the prophetic stage immediately preceeding Samuel, "The word of Yahweh was precious in those days; there was no widespread vision." It appears that the judges had prophetic as well as political power. Samuel had the double office of both priest and prophet. "In reality he (Samuel) marked the transition from the lower office of seer to the higher and more dignified office of prophet. As a prophet he was a worthy predecessor of Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, and other later prophets in Israel and Judah." <sup>1</sup>.

From a close reading of I Samuel 9:5-10 we learn these things about the seer. The seer was a Man of God. He was respected and held in honor. He had a direct relationship with God and was a foreseer and interpreter. It was customary to pay him a fee or a sum of money for his services. He was prophetic but he was also a priest. All this indicates that much had transpired since the time of Moses in regard to the conception of the prophet by the people of Israel.

### c. The Appearance of Bands or Companies of Prophets.

At the time of Samuel we find existing, bands or companies of prophets who seem to have traveled about and lived together. It is noteworthy that all that Samuel prophesied concerning

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1. Prof. Nathaniel Micklem, in art., I and II Sam., Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 383



b. The Appearance of the Seer.

We know little concerning the nature of prophecy during the time from Moses to Samuel, the seer. But besides Moses, the term, prophet, is applied to Abraham, Aaron, Eliah and Nedab, Miriam, and next, to Samuel. The description given in I Samuel 3:1 seems to indicate the nature of the prophetic stage immediately preceding Samuel, "The word of Yahweh was precious in those days; there was no widespread vision." It appears that the judges had prophetic as well as political power. Samuel had the double office of both priest and prophet. "In reality he (Samuel) marked the transition from the lower office of seer to the higher and more dignified office of prophet. As a prophet he was a worthy predecessor of Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, and other later prophets in Israel and Judah." I. From a close reading of I Samuel 9:5-10 we learn these things about the seer. The seer was a man of God. He was respected and held in honor. He had a direct relationship with God and was a forerunner and interpreter. It was customary to pay him a fee or a sum of money for his services. He was prophetic but he was also a priest. All this indicates that much had transpired since the time of Moses in regard to the conception of the prophet by the people of Israel.

c. The Appearance of Bands or Companies of Prophets.

At the time of Samuel we find existing bands or companies of prophets who seem to have traveled about and lived together. It is noteworthy that all that Samuel prophesied concerning



Saul came true, I Sam. 10:9. Saul met the band that used instruments of music and they leaped and danced about seeming to act out a certain form.

d. Appearances of the Prophetic Bands Under Elijah and Elisha.

At this stage we note the use of such terms as 'Schools of the Prophets' or more especially, 'The Sons of the Prophets.' Something should be said here of the nature of ecstatic prophecy. This was especially prominent of the bands at the time of Samuel. The word of Yahweh was thought to come to His prophets when they were in the ecstatic condition. Divine knowledge was supposed to be given them at this time.

"The case of Balaam is the classical example.<sup>1</sup> The history, it is true, contains no express allusion to such an ecstasy. But there are some decisive hints. Balaam's first attempt to curse Israel resulted in forecasting the nation's great numerical strength. Balak thought that the prophet was unduly influenced by the sight of the whole Israelite camp; he therefore took him to a place whence he could see but a small part of the people. This influence is most simply explained on the supposition that Balaam uttered his oracles while in a state of frenzy."<sup>2</sup>

Some of these prophets that traveled with the group were married, for a widow of one of the prophets is mentioned. These men lived and ate together, worked and traveled together and perhaps were in a great part supported by contributions of money

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1. Numbers 23 and 24

2. Loring W. Batten, The Hebrew Prophet, p. 23







and food from the people. These men held a great respect for their leaders and perhaps also for the former men whom they had studied. They carried on the traditions of Israel as a nation and other sayings were sung by them in true bard fashion.

e. The Appearance of the Individual Prophet.

We have dealt in a brief fashion with the history of the prophetic movement down to the time where the individual prophet is to stand out alone. The rise of the Assyrian peril was to call forth men in the capacity of the prophetic office. It is this fact perhaps as much as any other that called forth the emergence of the individual prophet. But while this danger of the overthrow of Israel caused the individual prophets to speak forth with condemnations against all nations, we find a deeper significance to the prophetic utterances. "---the final mission of prophecy was to liberate the eternal truths of religion from their temporary national embodiment, and disclose their true foundation in the immutable character of God and the essential nature of man."<sup>1</sup>. The time was ripe for the coming of strong men. Men who were ready to stand forth and to speak the words of Yahweh. This was indeed a difficult and a thankless task for no people like to hear adverse words directed against themselves or their nation.

"Hard as it is to be a saint, it is even harder to chasten a flagrant and wayward State, correct its perversity, and bring it back to the authority of the Most High. This the prophets of Israel did, not once or twice but on many occasions. In doing

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 14-15



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so, they prepared the way for the Christ who embodied their messages in His own and made them essential to His mission. Surely what in them was indispensable for Jesus is indispensable for us." <sup>1</sup>.

The prophets thought of themselves as representatives of Yahweh, and that it was their duty and privilege to interpret the word and will of God. Their conceptions of Yahweh and his moral ideal caused these men to have a deep appreciation of the righteousness, love, and character of Israel's God. One of the very greatest of these individual prophets of Israel was Jeremiah, who showed men the God of the individual. "But the novel and difficult task which confronted Jeremiah was that of reaching down to the hearts of men in order to purify their motives. -----He is here engaged in the most difficult and profound task that ever falls to the lot of men, namely, that of enlarging and deepening the conception of God." <sup>2</sup>.

A great deal of attention has been given over to a study of the way in which prophetic inspiration was received. This is a question that cannot be logically answered but one thing we know is that the prophet was the agent and the mouthpiece of Yahweh. The prophet did not lose his identity when he received revelation from God. "These men remained normal human beings. What they had to say was not the Word of the Lord, transmitted through a consciousness emptied of itself, but was

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1. S. Parks Cadmen, The Prophets of Israel, p. 6

2. Lindsay B. Longacre, A Prophet of the Spirit, p. 102-103



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the effect of that word on sensitive human hearts which gave forth their own peculiar tones 'like the Aeolian harp when its strings are swept by the wind.' <sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah was especially adapted to receive the revelation of his God. But even he did not always receive the desired information or truth which he hoped to get. After the murder of Gedaliah, when the captains came and asked Jeremiah whether they should remain in Jerusalem and run the risk of Nebuchadnezzar's wrath or flee to Egypt, Jeremiah was unable to give them an answer but waited for ten days before he received a communication from God as to what he should say. (Jeremiah 42:7) But Jeremiah knew that he would receive the right word from Yahweh for, he knew his life was fulfilling the demands of his God. <sup>2</sup>.

"The prophet was in some sort a spiritual scientist. It was his to study the mind of God in His dealings with men. He had to discover the Divine attitude towards human relationship, an attitude expressed not in an arbitrary system of rewards and punishments, but in a reasonable chain of cause and effect. To

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 43

2. Origen, Against Celsus, Chapter VII

"In regard to the prophets among the Jews, some of them were wise even before they became divinely inspired prophets, while others became wise by the illumination which their minds received when divinely inspired. They were selected by Divine Providence to receive the Divine Spirit, and to be the depositaries of His holy oracles, on the ground of their leading a life of almost unapproachable excellence, intrepid, noble, unmoved by danger or death. For reason teaches that such ought to be the character of the prophets of the Most High."

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him was granted the insight, born of direct communion with God, to see with startling clarity that a given type of conduct, still more a given attitude of soul, carried within itself the seeds of prosperity or disaster." 1.

Jeremiah was truly a specialist in the realm of the spiritual. He kept himself in close harmony with God and not only learned to raise his own spirit above the "trammels of matter" but lived his life in an effort to show others how to live this higher, nobler life. He showed to the world that any inspiration that causes man to raise the plane of his living is revelation, divine revelation. And who can say that Jeremiah did not live on the highest plane knowable to man in his time? Jeremiah was a true prophet of the spirit.

#### f. The High Point of Prophecy in Jeremiah.

Through the period of the prophets previous to Jeremiah we find that there is a strict nationalistic tendency or basis to prophecy. We are here to see that in Jeremiah there is a transition from this tendency to that of emphasis on the religion of the individual. In this emphasis on the individual it is also given a universal application that it never possessed before. After all, the true task of prophecy was to liberate the truths of religion from their national emphasis and to demonstrate that the true foundation of religion was to be found in the changeless character of the Eternal and the corresponding nature of man. This great advance in prophecy takes place fully in Jeremiah.

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1. Theodore H. Robinson, Prophecy and the Prophets, p. 46



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This climatic point in prophecy is shown to culminate in Jeremiah by two scholars, Ewald and Wellhausen, though, as Skinner points out their approach to this decision is from different routes. "Jeremiah stands on the highest level of prophetic achievement, where prophecy becomes conscious at once of its true essence and of its inherent limitations, and reveals a failure of inward force which points to its impending decline. This is seen chiefly in the intrusion of personal emotion into the consciousness of the prophet,-----." <sup>1</sup>.

But this is a negative approach and does not give full significance to the work of Jeremiah as should be done. Skinner shows us that Wellhausen takes the positive approach in defining Jeremiah's place in prophecy. "Jeremiah's specific greatness lies in the sphere of personal religion. The strongly marked emotionalism of his temperament is not to be regarded as a weakness or an impediment, but as the endowment of a spirit touched to fine issues, and perhaps a necessary condition of the heart to heart converse with God which unsealed within him the perennial fount of true piety,---the religious susceptibility of the individual soul." <sup>2</sup>.

We are interested here, not in the decline of prophecy after Jeremiah, but in its climax as reached in this prophet. It would almost appear that prophecy had been building up from nationalistic tendencies to the time of Jeremiah when it was to reach its most important aspects in its emphasis on the religious

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life of the individual. It was Jeremiah who gave this new ideal to prophecy and therefore we can rightly say that the richness of the prophetic movement in Israel finds its highest expression in the life and character of the prophet Jeremiah.

### 1. Jeremiah's Prophecy

The prophet Jeremiah lived in a time when the people of Israel were thought to have made a covenant with their God so that they would love him and he would love them. In turn, his people. This covenant was expressed in the use of certain figures to express the nature of the bond between God and his people. The most common and best known of these is the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. "The Hebrew word for 'covenant' (berith) probably originally meant a 'fellowship' or 'bond', but as time went on it came to be used in the sense of a solemn agreement or promise, or a bond imposed by one party upon another, or a pledge made by one to another. . . . A 'covenant' would be a compact, a law, and a pledge." 1.

Following the time of Jeremiah this word took on a new sense of the covenant was not only a bond but also a law. Previous to this time it is not known exactly what was understood by its use but we do know that it was thought to be a solemn obligation and was to be literally kept. The breaking of a covenant was unthinkable and that is why Jeremiah says Yahweh had the right to punish Judah. 2. This conception of the bond between Yahweh and his people early came to use certain figures to express this bond of

1. Albert D. Noyes, The Religious Teachings of the Old Testament, p. 176

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## Chapter V

### The Prophecy of the New Covenant

#### 1. Covenants before Jeremiah.

To the anthropomorphic minded people of Israel it was thought necessary to have some kind of agreement with their God so they could know that he was their God and they, in turn, his people. This conception was answered in the use of certain figures to express the divine love of God to his people. The most common one used was that of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel. "The Hebrew word of 'covenant' (berith) probably originally meant a 'fetter' or 'bond', and so came to be used in the sense of a compact between two parties, or a decree imposed by one party upon another, or a pledge made by one to another.--- A 'covenant' would be a compact, a law, and a pledge." <sup>1</sup>.

Following the time of Deuteronomy this three fold sense of the covenant was used and understood as such. Previous to this time it is not known exactly what was understood by its use but we do know that it was thought to be a solemn obligation and was to be literally kept. The breaking of a covenant was unthinkable and that is why Jeremiah says Yahweh had the right to punish Judah.<sup>2</sup> This conception of the bond between Yahweh and his people early came to use certain figures to express this bond of

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love. The two main figures used were those representing Yahweh as the "Father" of his people and also as "Husband" in the marriage bond. <sup>1</sup>.

"The relation of Jehovah to Israel throughout the whole period of Israel's religion is conceived in terms of a 'covenant' (the word used denotes a 'bond' of some sort). The covenant relation is not a bargain, but the obligation of a growing friendship. There was the covenant at Sinai (Exodus 24: 3-8,) a blood-communion between God and man. There was the covenant of Deuteronomy (29:1; cf. 26:17, 18), which was a mutual engagement, inspired by the teaching of the eighth-century prophets. There was the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7, 8), as conceived in the Priestly Code, which was a divine promise, fulfilled in many institutions. Thus we may say that the idea of a covenant is the constant background to the idea of salvation or redemption." <sup>2</sup>.

At first the conception of this covenant was only between Yahweh and the nation of Israel. There was thought to be no place in the covenant for the individual apart from the nation. "The individual Israelite could only hold communion with his God in so far as he was a member of the covenanted kingdom of Israel. But already there had been more than one indication that the covenant might become as it were de-nationalized without losing any of its force. We refer to the fact that families

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as well as the nation were selected for this special honour." <sup>1.</sup>  
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## 2. The New Covenant.

Jeremiah was to understand and appreciate all of the foregoing covenants with Yahweh and the Nation and with families but he was to go much farther than the limitations of these compacts permitted. He felt a dissatisfaction with his lot as an individual and at the same time felt a sense of his own sinfulness apart from the sin of the nation. He had a realization that the greatest good and the supreme happiness of life is to be found in a personal relationship with God.

"Heal me, O Jehovah, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise. Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of Jehovah? let it come now. As for me, I have not hastened from being a shepherd after thee; neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was before thy face. Be not a terror unto me: thou art my refuge in the day of evil." Jer. 17:14-17.

In this passage Jeremiah shows his belief in a personal relationship with God. In his vision of the potter, (Jer. 18:1-10) the prophet shows us that God can mold the character of the nation. If the first attempt is shattered the potter can remake the vessel into a different kind so that it will have some useful shape. So too can Yahweh do with Israel and will do, if the people will only turn to Him. Jeremiah believes that this turning to Yahweh can best be accomplished as individuals in the nation in place of the nation as a whole. He could see little hope that his people would as a nation turn to Yahweh. He points out like prophets had before him that the people as a

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nation had never ceased to break their covenant with God. "It was the breakdown of every earthly hope which had driven Jeremiah back to find his refuge and his hope in fellowship with God. And it was the collapse of every aspiration for political independence and prosperity which caused Jeremiah to announce a new religious idea for the people as a whole." <sup>1</sup>.

No longer could Jeremiah see any hope in a revival of the old covenant, so he brings forth this all-important new idea, a new covenant.

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more." (Jer. 31:31-34)

"What, then, are the positive features of the religious relationship established by the New Covenant? There are three: (1) INWARDNESS: 'I will put My law in their inward part'; (2) INDIVIDUALISM: 'all shall know Me'; (3) FORGIVENESS OF SINS: 'their sins I will remember no more,' Now, all these are indispensable conditions of true fellowship with God; but in the present connexion the last two, which follow the covenant formula,

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 226-227



... "It  
... as the ... of every ... which had given ...  
... and his ... in ... with  
... and it was the ... of every ... for ...  
... and prosperity which caused ... to ...  
... for the ... as a whole."  
... for the ... in a ... of the  
... as he ... this all-important ...  
... new covenant.

"... the ... come, with ... that I  
... will ... a new covenant with the house of Israel,  
... and with the house of Judah; that according to the  
... covenant that I made with their fathers in the day  
... that I took them by the hand to bring them out of  
... the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke,  
... although I was a husband unto them, said the Lord.  
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... 'I will put my law in their inward parts'; (2)  
... 'I will be their Father'; (3) ... OF SIN;  
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appear to have a secondary emphasis. The second is an expansion or corollary of the first; and the third, introduced by 'For,' seems to characterize the whole relationship as founded on reconciliation with God. The central truth, therefore, on which the emphasis of the prophecy lies, is the inwardness of true religion - the spiritual illumination of the individual mind and conscience, and doing of the will of God from a spontaneous impulse of the renewed heart. To Christian theology the promise has meant nothing less than this, and the prophecy of the New Covenant has therefore been regarded as one of the profoundest anticipations of the perfect religion that the Old Testament contains." <sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah sensed correctly that the trouble with the disobedience of the covenant laws of God was not because of fault in the laws themselves but because these same laws demanded a mechanical and formal obedience which did not make adequate demands upon the individual's spirit. No set of laws could ever cover every aspect of daily life so then there must always be something left that only the spirit can fulfill. It was this beyond on the fringe of law that Jeremiah recognized and tried to reach in his New Covenant so as to include the whole man in a personal religious relation between God and the individual.

Jeremiah could not but have known that the carrying out of his New Covenant would cause the priesthood to disappear and would also be the end of the prophetic office. But if his unique conception of the relationship of God and man was

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 329-330



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completely carried out in the lives of men Jeremiah saw that there would be found the prophetic spirit<sup>1</sup> in each man's heart. Then too, there would be no need of written laws, indeed even of the scriptures, because the Living Word would be implanted in the hearts and lives of men. This is a rich and noble goal for the religious life which is becoming more and more recognized today as ideal.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Inner Life of Jeremiah.

We have seen in the call of Jeremiah how deeply religious was the personal life of the prophet. His lonely life was conducive to deep meditative thinking and he learned this practice early in life and no doubt continued it through to the very end of his stormy life. It was out of these moody but revelatory periods that Jeremiah conceived his interpretation of life in the form of the New Covenant. But before we could fully appreciate this masterpiece of his we need to peer deeply into his

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1. See Lindsay B. Longacre, A Prophet of the Spirit, p. 114-115.

2. For a modern evaluation of the New Covenant, see Sidney A. Weston, The Prophets and the Problems of Life, p. 157. "A. Religion is to be found in the heart: in the inward parts and not in forms or ceremonies, burnt offerings and sacrifices. B. The individual is to have direct access to God: This is really the heart of our Protestant religion, which refused to accept the priests or the Church or the Virgin Mary as intermediaries between man and his God. The conscience of the individual is his final authority, and religion is a direct relationship between man and God. Note the beautiful way in which Jeremiah expressed this - 'I will make a new covenant----I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it; I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Jesus was familiar with this passage and may have had it in mind at the Last Supper, when he said to his disciples, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins.' (Matthew 26: 26-30)."



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inner nature to know the man and see how it was possible for him to receive this great revelation of religion. We can do no better than to study carefully the Confessions of Jeremiah that were briefly mentioned in the first chapter. We shall reproduce here the translation of these heart-searching documents according to Skinner in order to catch a new and inspirational insight into the character of Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Plot Against his Life. (11:18-23)

"But Yahwe made me know, and I knew:  
 Their ill deeds I saw;  
 While I like a tame pet-lamb  
 That is led to the shambles  
 Knew not that for my undoing  
 They hatched a plot:  
 'Let us kill the tree in its sap, -  
 Cut him off from the land of the living,  
 That his name be remembered no more.'

Ah but, O Eternal, thou just judge,  
 testing the very heart and mind,  
 I shall see thee take vengeance on them;  
 for I have told thee of my plight.  
 "This, then, is the Eternal's sentence on the men  
 of Anathoth, who seek your life, saying, 'You must not  
 prophesy in the name of the Eternal, else you die at  
 our hands' - this is what the Lord of hosts has to say:  
 I will punish them,  
 their young men shall be put to the sword,  
 their sons and daughters shall perish by famine,  
 not one survivor shall be left to them;  
 for I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth,  
 in the year fixed for their punishment."  
 (vv. 20-23 by Moffatt)

#### The Problem of Retribution. (12:1-3; 5)

"Thou art in the right, O Yahwe,  
 Should I dispute with Thee;  
 Yet of matters of right  
 Would I speak with Thee.  
 Why is the way of the wicked so smooth,  
 And all treacherous men at ease?  
 Thou plantest them: they also strike root,  
 Beget and bear fruit.

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Near art Thou in their mouth,  
 But how far from their heart!  
 But Thou, O Yahweh, hast known me,  
 Hast tried how my heart is with Thee.  
 Drag them forth like sheep to the shambles,  
 For a day of slaughter devote them!  
 With footmen thou hast run and art weary,  
 Then how wilt thou vie with horses?  
 In a land of peace thou art not at ease,  
 Then how wilt thou fare in Jordan's brake?

A General Complaint and Prayer. (15:10-18)

"Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me  
 A man at strife with all the world!  
 Nor borrower nor lender am I;  
 And all men curse me!  
 Say, Lord, if I have not persisted  
 With Thee for the enemy's good:  
 And pleaded with Thee in the evil day,  
 In the day of distress!  
 Thou knowest it, Yahwe!  
 Remember, and visit me graciously.  
 Avenge Thyself on my persecutors,  
 And not in Thy long-suffering!  
 Know that for Thee I have borne reproach  
 From all who despise Thy word.  
 But to me is Thy word a delight, -  
 The joy of my heart;  
 For Thy name has been named upon me,  
 O Yahwe of hosts.  
 With the merry crew I sat not rejoicing;  
 Lonely I sat because of Thy hand:  
 For with spleen Thou hast filled me.  
 Why is my grief perpetual? -  
 My wound mortal,  
 That will not be healed?  
 Wilt Thou be to me like a winter brook,  
 As waters that fail?

The Divine Answer (15:19-21)

"Therefore thus saith Yahwe:  
 If thou return, I will restore thee;  
 Thou shalt stand before Me:  
 If pure thoughts thou utter, unmixed with base,  
 Thou shalt be as My mouth.  
 These men shall come round to thee,  
 But not thou to them.  
 I will make thee to this people  
 A wall strong as brass:  
 They will fight, but shall not o'ercome thee;



Near art thou in their mouth,  
 But how far from their heart!  
 But thou, O Yahweh, hast known me,  
 Hast tried how my heart is with thee.  
 Draw them forth like sheep to the slaughter,  
 For a day of slaughter dost thou lead them;  
 With footmen thou hast run and art weary,  
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For I am with thee to save thee,  
To deliver thee from the hand of the wicked,  
From the grip of the terrible.

Yahwe the Searcher of Hearts. (17:9-10)

"Deep beyond sounding is the heart.  
And sick beyond cure;  
Who can know it?  
I, Yahweh, search the heart,  
And try the reins;  
To give to a man as his ways,  
The fruit of his doings.

A Prayer for Healing and Succor. (17:14-18)

"Heal me, Yahwe, that I may be healed;  
Save me that I may be saved;  
For Thou art my praise!  
Lo! They are saying to me,  
'Where, then, is Yahweh's word?  
Let it but come!'  
But I have not pressed for the evil day,  
Nor desired the day of woe:  
Thou knowest.  
What has come forth from my lips  
Lies plain before Thee.  
Be not a terror to me,  
Thou, my trust in the evil day!  
May my foes be put to shame and not I:  
May they be dismayed, and not I!  
Bring on them the day of evil;  
Destroy them with double destruction.

A Conspiracy Against the Prophet's Life (18:18-23)

"Come, They have said, 'Let us hatch  
Against him a plot!  
(For never shall Torah fail the priest,  
Nor counsel the sage, nor word the prophet!)  
Come, with the tongue we will smite him,  
And carefully watch his words.'

Watch Thou them, O Yahwe!  
And hear what my enemies say.  
Should evil be rendered for good? (20:14-18)  
Think how I stood before Thee  
To speak for their good,  
To turn Thy wrath from them.  
While they digged a pit to entrap me,  
And snares did lay for my feet.



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But Thou, O Yahwe, well knowest  
 All their designs for my death.  
 Let not their guilt be atoned for,  
 Nor their sin blotted out from Thy sight.  
 May they stumble and fall before Thee!  
 In the time of Thy wrath deal with them.

The Word of the Lord a Reproach and a Burden (20:7-12)

"Thou hast deceived me, Yahweh; and I was deceived:  
 Wast stronger than I, and prevailedst.  
 I am a laughingstock all the day;  
 All men deride me.

Whene'er I speak I am mocked;  
 Of violence and wrong is my cry;  
 For Yahweh's word is to me a reproach  
 And derision all day long.

If I said, 'I will seek to forget Him,  
 And speak no more in His name,'  
 'Twas like a glowing fire in my breast,  
 Shut up in my bones,  
 I was weary with keeping it under;  
 I could not hold out.

I hear the whisper of many:  
 'Denounce! Ay, We'll denounce him!  
 All you who are friends of his bosom,  
 Watch him askance.  
 He may haply be fooled, and give us the power  
 To wreak our revenge.'

But Yahwe is on my side,  
 A Hero of might.  
 Therefore my foes shall stumble,  
 And shall not prevail.  
 Shamed shall they be that they acted amiss,  
 With eternal, never-forgotten disgrace.

But, Yahwe of hosts, Thou righteous Searcher!  
 Who seest the reins and the heart:  
 Let me see Thy vengeance upon them;  
 For on Thee I roll my complaint.

Jeremiah Curses his Birth. (20:14-18)

"Curs'd be the day I was born,  
 The day when my mother bore me -  
 Be it unblessed!

Curs'd be the man who brought to my father  
 The good news: 'A man-child is born' -  
 Making him glad!



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May that day be like the cities  
 That God overthrew,  
 And pitied them not!  
 May its morning hear the cry of distress,  
 Its noon the shout of battle!  
 Because it slew me not in the womb,  
 That my mother had been my grave,  
 And her womb pregnant for ever.

Why came I forth from the womb  
 To see trouble and sorrow,  
 To consume my days in shame?

These verses give us a very good index of his emotional life. He was literally one against the world, alone, except that Yahweh was his succor and friend. It was this realization that forced Jeremiah to coin the New Covenant so that all men might learn to know the possession of God as Jeremiah knew it. It is true that the prophet was very nearly overcome by his mental griefs and this has caused many to misunderstand him but he fought his battle and won!

"It seems to me that we can understand Jeremiah better if we think of the spiritual agony of the 'Confessions' as the Gethsemane, rather than the Calvary, of his life. When we behold the calm courage and self possession with which he faces death and outrage and imprisonment under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, we get the impression of a man whose inward struggles are over, who has emerged with the victory over himself, and braced for his closing part." 1.

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 209



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The Confessions of Jeremiah have rightly been termed a "Spiritual Diary." The Confessions were this for Jeremiah because in them he wrote the inmost thoughts of his heart. These oracles are an indication of the spiritual wrestlings and the aspirations of the prophet. The Confessions depict for us the heart-searchings to which Jeremiah subjected himself. They take the form of a dialogue between himself and God and then the form of obloquy and despair. But in these questionings he found a peace and a hope for himself and his people that he would not have known had he repressed his questions and kept them to himself. In his challenging God he discovered that which is his chief contribution to mankind, the value of the individual and the possibility of a rich and close relationship between the individual and God. By this subjective method, the prophet became very sure of God and because of this his spirit rose above his own stormy life and gave to the world a conquering faith.

"History has given Jeremiah a vindication far beyond any he ever imagined or desired. Not only in his proclamation of a divine message, but even more in the inner, personal experiences which these confessions reveal, is he the spiritual ancestor not only of the One who prayed, "Why has thou forsaken me?" and, "If it be possible, let this cup pass," but also of all those who have learned that the revolt of the soul against traditional doctrines often indicates faith's vigor rather than faith's decay."<sup>1</sup>

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In this way the Confessions of Jeremiah have been a source of comfort and a challenge to seekers of God. Our religious life would be greatly impoverished had we not this record of the soul-stirring experiences of this prophet. "It is not too much to say that if these precious fragments had perished, not only would the most vital element in Jeremiah's individuality and influence have remained unknown, but the devotion of the Jewish Church would have been immeasurably poorer in that strain of personal piety which saved its religion from degenerating into a soulless legalism."<sup>1</sup>.

It cannot definitely be determined when the Confessions were written but it is probably true that they came some time after the prophet had begun his public ministry. They do not make a connected series but they cover the vital questionings of the prophet and his hours of despair. He was driven in upon himself and in this subjective study he turned to God, seeking an answer for both the sufferings of himself and his people. The most central point of the Confessions is the struggle depicted, in the mind of Jeremiah, between his own natural feelings and yearnings and the dictates of his religious spirit.

The first thing we notice in these Confessions is the manner in which the prophet meets persecution. At the time of his call he had been warned that persecution and trouble was to be his lot but he was to receive much more of this than he had anticipated. He was put into public pillors and made the laughing stock of the people. This was too much for his sensitive

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nature and he breaks forth with imprecations on his enemies. But there was more behind this outburst than mere physical discomfort. The prophet's heart was heavy because of the failure of his message to strike the hearts of the people and move them to repentance. Instead, his message, the message of the most high God, was rejected and this the prophet could not understand in his people so he flays them with indignation.

This grief causes him to debate the idea of giving up his prophetic office but this he could not do. "If I say, I will not think of Him nor speak any more in His name, it is in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones." This in turn brings him to the point of self-examination wherein he is to turn more completely to Yahweh than ever before and he learns to trust Him with his life and future.

This subjective scrutiny led him to the realization of his need of prayer. His prayer life was to prove to be a revelation of his own spirit to future generations and to be a model of the spirit of man in complete communion and surrender to the Father's will.

"He prays for healing (17:14) - which may mean either spiritual healing of his sick heart (17:9) or removal of the troubles which oppressed him and perhaps had undermined his physical health - he prays for help against his adversaries (17:18), for vindication of the cause he represents, and also (as we have seen) for vengeance on his persecutors. But to Jeremiah prayer

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J. John Miller, *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 213-214.



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is more than petition. It is intimate converse with God, in which his whole inner life is laid bare, with its perplexities and struggles and temptations; and he unburdens himself of the distress which weighs down his spirit, in the sure confidence that he heard and understood by the God to whom all things are naked and open." 1.

In prayer Jeremiah found himself. He had been trying to carry on his prophetic office like a priest, in that he tested the lives of those about him and considered himself, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. But in prayer he learned to lay his own soul bare to Yahweh and Jeremiah discovered that he himself had to come much closer before he could say that he was standing in the presence of God. Wellhausen terms him, "The father of true prayer." Prayer did for Jeremiah what it can do for men of all ages and that is to make the individual see himself as God must see him.

Jeremiah saw that his rebellion, his anger against his fellowmen and his desire for vengeance were all odious to God and therefore he had to purge himself of these selfish and unholy traits. His Confessions reveal both his natural tendencies and his spiritual possibilities to us. After the refining influence of Yahweh's presence Jeremiah stands before us in his Confessions as the prophet with a God-like spirit, an individual who knew God. The Confessions show him to have been a human being but they also reveal him as one of the most spiritual men the world has ever known.

1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 213-214.



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## Chapter VI

### Jeremiah as Prophet

#### I. The Weeping Prophet.

Most of the pictures depicting the prophet, Jeremiah, show him as the weeping prophet. This is due in part to the fact that many thought he was the author of Lamentations but it is due also to the fact that Jeremiah really was a weeping prophet. He wept, like Jesus wept, over the city of Jerusalem, but we can never truthfully say that the prophet is of the "weepy" nature. He is not a weeping prophet in the true sense of the word but he literally groans for his people with just cause (20:8).

In the first place Jeremiah had a most difficult task to perform. He was called against his will to be the messenger of unwanted tidings, which was that Yahweh was to wreak punishment on the people for their own sins. "The first address of our prophet was throughout of a sombre cast, and the darkness of its close was not relieved by a single ray of hope. It was essentially a comminatory discourse, the purpose of it being to rouse a sinful nation to the sense of its peril, by a faithful picture of its actual condition, which was so different from what it was supposed to be." <sup>1</sup>.

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1. C. J. Ball, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 114

2. Alex. R. Gordon, The Prophecy of the Old Testament, p. 164

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Jeremiah was a man of peace yet he is called upon constantly to be a man of strife because of his unwelcome message and this caused conflict and suffering within his own nature. He was not allowed to mingle with his people as he would have liked (15:17) and was forced to bear his discouragements himself as he had neither wife nor family to cheer him when he was depressed. But the greatest disappointment of all for him to face was the seeming fact that Yahweh was unfaithful to him.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah loved his people with a long-suffering tender love and it grieved him terribly to know that the wickedness of his people would bring down the wrath of God, but he was loyal to his God. "This twofold sympathy of the prophet - sympathy for his people and a yet deeper sympathy with Yahweh's purpose - made him the moral 'trier' or assayer of Judah."<sup>2</sup> And it was this twofold loyalty in Jeremiah that made his life an internal turmoil but at the same time produced a character that was to live and grow through the ages.

"Men resented the stern sadness of his words and looks, and turned from him with aversion and dislike. His unpopularity had made him somewhat harsh; for intolerance is twice curst, in that it inoculates its victims with the virus of its own bitterness."<sup>3</sup>

When we consider the deep love Jeremiah had for his people and when we see how they mocked him (20:8) we must agree with

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1. "Why is my pain perpetual, and wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou indeed be unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?" (15:18)
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Skinner, "No doubt his versatile emotional temperament reacts variously to the prospect of ruin which he clearly foresaw; but we have seen enough to show that there were times when his overcharged sorrow could find no expression save in bitter and solitary weeping." <sup>1</sup>. But we believe that people have unjustly stigmatized him as the weeping prophet when only a few verses of his book show this aspect of his character when all along we read of the strength of his courage and soul. <sup>2</sup>. There is a joyful and buoyant side to his nature as well, as Ballantine points out.

"So far as we have data for a judgment, Jeremiah was the healthiest, strongest, bravest, grandest man of Old Testament history. There is not a scrap of evidence that he was otherwise than naturally ardent, hopeful, buoyant, with a soul as full of song as a bird's." <sup>3</sup>.

## 2. The Rebel Prophet.

Jeremiah has often been termed the rebel prophet for he was nothing short of this in the eyes of the people in his day. There are two kinds of rebels, one who is a throwback, the other is a progressive rebel. Both kinds are met with strong opposition. The degenerate rebel is a menace to the welfare of society and the progressive rebel is not only frowned upon but is actually persecuted because the people are unprepared for his new views and do not understand them.

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 136

2. See Jeremiah 13:17; 14:17; 9:1; 8:21

3. William G. Ballantine, Jeremiah, a Character Study, p. 10



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Jeremiah was a rebel of idealism and was hounded on all sides because of this fact. Socrates was a progressive rebel and Athens forced him to drink the cup of hemlock. Jeremiah was misunderstood and falsely accused in like manner nearly two hundred years before Socrates. But Jeremiah was a double rebel. "He was a rebel against the spiritual practices of his day, and on all its essential points he challenged and defied it. But what is more interesting, he was a political rebel, and in the eyes of some a traitor to his nation and his country."<sup>1</sup> The prophet would not speak smooth words to the sinning people and was therefore hated for his just but unmerciful condemnations.

Jeremiah was a rank rebel in his time because he saw fit to do away with the Torah that had ruled Israel for centuries. He would do away with the priesthood and declared there was no power of itself in the venerated ark. He attacked the temple and to do this was to strike at the most emotional center of the Hebrew people. The worship practices he declared to be useless and defiling. He showered words of accusation upon both king and people, he was not only a spiritual, but also a political rebel. But the heresy of the rebellion in Jeremiah was in later years to become the orthodox religion.

### 3. Jeremiah and Deuteronomy.

It has been thought by some that Jeremiah was the author of sections of Deuteronomy, the Book of the Law but such is not the case. We can be sure that Jeremiah was well acquainted with

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Skinner thinks that there was a change of heart on Jeremiah's part in regard to the Deuteronomic reform. <sup>2</sup>. Jeremiah was called to his prophetic office in 626 B. C. the Deuteronomic reform beginning in 621 B. C. It has often been commented upon that it is strange that Jeremiah was not consulted by Josiah concerning the reform or the meaning of the Book of the Law. But the first years of Jeremiah's ministry may have been spent mostly in solitude or in Anathoth away from the temple. But even so, it seems that the prophet espoused the cause of the reform with a ready zeal that may have been the cause of the wrath of his fellowmen (11:18-23; and 12:1-6).

He perhaps at first accepted the reform with a strong welcome because it was some kind of a reform and that it was just what his people needed. But the prophet began to realize that the reform was superficial and was unable to cope with the prevailing immorality and the superstitions in vogue at this time. He began to see the dangers involved in a formal acceptance of

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the creed or covenant with an outward compliance with its demands but an unchanging inner life. But he did not wish entirely to give up the law but he did realize that the law of itself could never cause Israel to change and become a pure holy nation. But there was, nevertheless a close relationship between the written law of the reform and the cries of Jeremiah's pious heart.<sup>1</sup> But the apparent failure of this reform caused Jeremiah to seek new truths and thus was born his epoch-making, New Covenant.

#### 4. His Place in History.

Like many a great man Jeremiah was not fully appreciated by his own age. Indeed he was more often looked upon as a public enemy instead of a benefactor and more than once nearly lost his life because of the distrust and hatred of his fellow-men. Tradition says that he finally lost his life in Egypt at the hands of his infuriated countrymen whom he loved with an over-whelming passion. No, Jeremiah was not appreciated by his contemporaries but later men were to see in him such character as is possessed by only the world's greatest men.

"Those twenty-three years of patient thought and earnest labor, of high converse with God, and of agonized pleading with a reprobate people, were not to be without their fruit, though the prophet himself was not to see it. It is a matter of history that the words of Jeremiah wrought with such power upon the hearts of the exiles in Babylonia, as to become, in the hands of God, a principal means in the regeneration promised

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1. See A. W. Streane, Jeremiah, (Cambridge Bible) p. xxxvi.



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and its actual consequence; and from that day to this, not one of all the goodly fellowship of the prophets has enjoyed such credit in the Jewish church as he who in his lifetime had to encounter neglect and ridicule, hatred and persecution, beyond what is recorded of any other."<sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah had a tremendous influence upon later Old Testament characters as well as upon the person of Jesus in the New Testament. His new-found subjective religion was to be a valuable contribution to Christianity. He brings us the realization of a personal dynamic religion and in the field of prayer he plumbed spiritual depths probably never found before him or since excepting in Jesus. These were his contributions to the world and these will ever afford him a large place in history. Not only the things he gave to posterity make him famous but perhaps still more important is what he was, his unique character.

"That he always rose above discouragement, never lost his courage or his faith, was as dauntless at the end of his long life as at the beginning, proves him to have been one of this world's immortals."<sup>2</sup>.

Isaiah had previously prophesied before Jeremiah that the temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem would never be destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

1. C. J. Ball, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 36

2. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 221

3. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 171

3. Isaiah 26:16



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1. G. J. Bull, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 36  
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## Chapter VII

### Personal Beliefs of Jeremiah

#### 1. Beliefs Concerning the Temple.

Jeremiah saw early in his ministry that the temple in Jerusalem was not all it should be. And in spite of the Deuteronomic reform the conditions were really worse at the time of Josiah's death than previously. The Jews thought their state and temple to be eternal and it was indeed a terrible blow when Josiah the king was killed 608 B. C. But even then the people could not see the light and pointed with assurance to the temple that was still standing. It was probably at this time that Jeremiah brought forth his prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple as a surety.<sup>1</sup> Skinner transposes v. 4 in Jeremiah 7:8-15 and declares the original speech of Jeremiah to have been the following.

"Trust not in these misleading words, 'The palace of Yahwe the palace of Yahwe, the palace of Yahwe, is all this!' What? Steal and murder! and commit adultery! and swear falsely! and sacrifice to Baal! and then come and stand before Me in this house and say, 'We are delivered': - in order to perpetrate all these abominations! Is it a robbers' den that you take My house for? Verily as such do I also regard it, saith Yahwe. But go now to My sanctuary which was in Shilo, where I placed My name first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now because you do all these deeds, I will do to this house in which you trust as I did to Shiloh; I will cast you out from My presence as I cast out your brethren, the whole seed of Ephraim."<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah had previously prophesied before Jeremiah that the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem would never be destroyed.<sup>3</sup> Then

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"Trust not in these misleading words, 'The palace of Yahweh, the palace of Yahweh, the palace of Yahweh, is all this!' What? Upright and murder! and commit adultery! and swear falsely! and sacrifice to Baal! and then come and stand before Me in this house and say, 'We are delivered'; - in order to perpetrate all these abominations! Is it a robbery? then that you take My house for? Verily as such do I also regard it, saith Yahweh. But go now to My sanctuary which was in Shilo, where I placed My name first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now because you do all these deeds, I will do to this house in which you trust as I did to Shilo; I will cast you out from My presence as I cast out your brethren, the whole seed of Ephraim."<sup>2</sup>

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the Deuteronomic reform had accentuated the claims and prestige of this temple by the fact that other places of worship were destroyed and centered in Jerusalem. All of these facts caused the people of Israel to have a fanatical conviction that the temple of Yahweh was indestructible. They felt that the very fact that they had the temple in their midst was assurance of special divine favor and that no real harm could come to them.

Not only do we find this belief in a false security invested in the mere presence of the temple but there is also a greater sin on the part of the people and priesthood. The practices of worship in the temple had become corrupt and sacriligious. Worship in the temple had become an organised hypocrisy. People were accustomed to live lives of gross immorality and then to come presenting themselves at the temple in the belief that they were thus made sanctimoniously clean and acceptable in Yahweh's sight. Thieves, adulterers, men whose daily lives were an open violation of every known law of God came to the temple for protection and security. The courts of the temple were crowded with worshipers but this Jeremiah saw to be not a healthy sign of the spiritual condition of his people but rather that it displayed their perversity and hypocrisy.

So Jeremiah had to show the people that religion, pure and acceptable in the sight of Yahweh need not be connected with the temple at all but that it must be an affair of the heart. A mere admonition to change their lives would have had little or no effect so Jeremiah chose the spectacular though extremely



the Deuteronomist reform had accentuated the claims and prestige of this temple by the fact that other places of worship were destroyed and centered in Jerusalem. All of these facts caused the people of Israel to have a fanatical conviction that the temple of Yahweh was indestructible. They felt that the very fact that they had the temple in their midst was assurance of special divine favor and that no real harm could come to them. Not only do we find this belief in a false security invested in the mere presence of the temple but there is also a greater aim on the part of the people and priesthood. The practices of worship in the temple had become corrupt and esoteric. Worship in the temple had become an organized hypocrisy. People were accustomed to live lives of gross immorality and then to come presenting themselves at the temple in the belief that they were thus made sanctimoniously clean and acceptable in Yahweh's sight. Thieves, adulterers, men whose daily lives were an open violation of every known law of God came to the temple for protection and security. The courts of the temple were crowded with worshippers but this Jeremiah saw to be not a healthy sign of the spiritual condition of his people but rather that it displayed their perversity and hypocrisy. So Jeremiah had to show the people that religion, pure and acceptable in the sight of Yahweh need not be connected with the temple at all but that it must be an affair of the heart. A mere ambition to change their lives would have had little or no effect so Jeremiah chose the spectacular though extremely



dangerous position of telling the people that their temple that they venerated almost above God himself was to be destroyed. For this he was arrested by his enraged and shocked kinsmen but was released probably because of the very intensity and earnestness of his words. It was an unpopular and dangerous statement he made when he declared that the temple was to be destroyed but he saw no hope for his people unless they cut themselves entirely away from the practiced sins of the temple and began a new changed life with God as the author of their standard of morals. Jeremiah knew this to be his duty so he steadfastly set about to accomplish it regardless of the grave dangers he knew would arise.

## 2. Jeremiah and the Sacrificial System.

In condemning the temple worship as a whole Jeremiah was specifically attacking the sacrificial system of his time.<sup>1</sup> In this attack he was following the lead of the pioneer Amos who attacked the sacrificial system with a vigorous denial that it was counted necessary or even acceptable by Yahweh. (Amos 5:21-25). Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, all preached a new order of spiritual acceptance in Yahweh's sight.<sup>2</sup> From centuries before it had been thought that sacrifice was necessary as establishing and maintaining intercourse or relation between God and man. Their belief concerning the relation or bond between

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1. "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you." 7:22-24

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Jeremiah attempts to show the people that the whole sacrificial system with all of its attendant rites was not based on the national religion as Yahweh's revelation had established this bond in the beginning.

Deuteronomy had not made sacrifice unduly prominent but had tried to purge it of heathen abominations. This would seem to be acceptable to Jeremiah but he realized that by nothing short of a complete change of the individual's attitude toward the whole system could any real spiritual progress be made. What the prophet was trying to correct was the fact that his people had made sacrifice a hindrance rather than a help to religion and a finding of God.

### 3. On Image Worship.

In the matter of image worship Jeremiah followed the lead of the prophet with whom he has often been likened, Hosea. Hosea was perhaps the first to scoff at the worship of images. The idols, he said, were man-made and therefore there was nothing divine about them. Jeremiah could not understand how his people could willingly give up Yahweh and follow heathen gods. "Expressions of pain and wonder often break from his lips at the thought of the blindness and infatuation of Israel in forsaking the true God to worship unreal beings that cannot profit.



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This was one of his earliest reflexions on the popular religion of Israel (2:4-13), and here it meets us again towards the close." 1.

In chapter 10:3-9, Jeremiah gives an unanswerable condemnation of images or idols. This passage would be real amusing if it were not for the intense sincerity of the prophet. But even then one can not help but see the irony evident in his description of the creation of idols by the hand of man and the utter helplessness of these same idols after they are fashioned. The men even had to be burdened with the weight of these same gods and carry them around from one place to another. He flays the practice of idolatry unmercifully because he wished to cause his people to see their own folly in worshiping and trusting in these useless gods when Yahweh of hosts is ready to be their God and to succor them in all their doings. "But Jehovah is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth trembleth, and the nations are not able to abide his indignation." (10:10)

#### 4. On Patriotism.

Perhaps Jeremiah made more enemies and was more misunderstood by his attitude toward patriotism than by any other one belief. The thinking people of today take for granted that there are two kinds of patriotism. One of these is, "my country, right or wrong, my country." The other kind is that, which has high ideals for its nation, and will do anything, suffer if need be, to bring these ideals into practice. The prophet

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 135



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Jeremiah had just such ideals for his nation as these. Besides a high moral and ethical ideal he had the religious ideals that demanded a wholehearted obedience to the commands of Yahweh. But this again was diametrically opposed to the general tone of the lives of the Hebrews and was therefore heartily opposed by people and king alike and Jeremiah was branded as a traitor and a coward, he who was the bravest and the most patriotic of them all to receive these jibes.

There were plenty of reasons why the people should, however, look upon Jeremiah as an unpatriotic citizen. He used various means to display the idea that Judah would be destroyed, one of these is the vision or parable of the figs in 24:1-10. No wonder that the people rebelled against this teaching. "Why should they be called 'rotten figs' and acquiesce supinely in the belief that they were to continue to be a subject people? ----He (Jeremiah) must have seemed intensely unpatriotic to his countrymen." 1.

One of his seemingly most brazen, unpatriotic acts was his advice to the soldiers and people of Jerusalem to desert to the Chaldeans when that people was laying siege to the city. Jeremiah had the audacity to tell the Hebrews to desert to the Chaldeans because the city was doomed. It is no wonder in the face of this charge that the patriots of Judah were enraged at Jeremiah and wished to destroy him. "The amazing thing is that Jeremiah was not mobbed and summarily executed as a traitor." 2.

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1. Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 259

2. Raymond Calkins, *ibid.*, p. 279



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The charge of treason was a likely one to bring against the prophet for was he not undermining the morale of the people by declaring doom on the city?

During this siege of Jerusalem the armies of the Chaldeans were removed for a time to meet the oncoming Egyptian army. At this time the prophet prepared to leave the city and go to his birthplace, Anathoth, on business. He was arrested for desertion at the northern gate of Jerusalem and the prophet was placed in a dungeon (37:16) for 'many days'. But he was later rescued by the vacillating Zedekiah (37:17-21).

The prophet was given some sort of freedom though a sad enough existence it must have been, after his rescue from the dungeon. But he had not retracted or recanted a single thing he had said in regard to the doom of Jerusalem and the ultimate victory by the Chaldeans. For he kept on demoralizing the morale of his people and undermining their combative power by going up and down preaching the same disconcerting things. So the princes and leaders of the city finally begged Zedekiah to put this trouble-maker to death. (38:4). The weak king gave them leave to deal with Jeremiah as they saw fit so they planned his death by putting him in the bottom of a miry cistern, there to die of starvation or to sink into oblivion. But again the prophet was saved, this time at the hand of an Ethiopian named Ebedmelech. Jeremiah was taken to the king who anxiously asked him for a good sign but Jeremiah, even in the face of death, and having just escaped certain death, did not change his message an iota.



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Consider the feelings of Jeremiah's countrymen at the time of this siege. The prophet, instead of doing what he could, what any patriotic man would do at a time like this, deliberately ruined the little chance Judah had for a victory by declaring that the Chaldeans would win the victory regardless of what the defenders of the city might do. Then too, he advised the defenders to desert to the enemies if they would save their lives. In face of this it would seem that Jeremiah was certainly a rank traitor and unpatriotic. Politically, he may have been called that but spiritually he was the most patriotic man in all Judah. The prophet was a long-visioned patriot, he was not thinking only of the immediate situation but looked forward into eternity. He saw the inevitable and hoped to save his people eventually by subjection for the time being and then by their reaching on to a higher and more noble nationality. In this, Jeremiah was an optimistic enthusiast for the welfare of his people.

His writings have revealed him to a greater extent than any other prophet was to make himself known to posterity. His Confessions give us a glimpse deep into his inner nature and we learn to appreciate and to sympathize with the man as a human being albeit, an unusual character. He has been grossly misunderstood and many have even claimed that he was psychologically abnormal. 1.

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## Chapter VIII

### An Analysis of His Character

#### 1. The Psychic Life of Jeremiah .

The study of Jeremiah's teachings is very interesting but is not as interesting perhaps as the study of the man himself. His was a unique and superb personality worthy of all the study we may care to put in upon his life. We are amazed at his energy and his ability to put up with, what for us, would be an impossible situation. We wonder what it was in his life that gave him the courage to carry on to a moral victory, to keep his head, when all around were losing theirs, and above all what there was in Jeremiah that influenced his successors and was to be found in millions of admirers more than two thousand years later.

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#### I. Abnormal.

I. Walter E. Dill, The Psychic Health of Jesus, p. 62. "In his catalogue of the religious pioneers whom he described as milder or more serious cases of epilepsy Rasmussen lists Elia, Elia, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah (and gives the following references in Jeremiah to prove his point.) (4:12; 16:1-5; 13:10; 17:13; 18:21; 20:10-13) ----"



It is of interest here to compare Jeremiah with the psychic character of Hamlet. Both men were misunderstood and thought to be insane by their contemporaries and even by men centuries later. "Hamlet is under the power of an urge which prevents him, in spite of himself, from carrying what he wants to carry out - what he regards as his duty to carry out. Jeremiah is under the power of an urge which drives him in spite of himself into unpopularity, torture, and danger of death." 1.

But Hamlet was merely a fictitious character while Jeremiah was a man of flesh and blood in history. One may admire Hamlet but one is compelled to admire, revere and almost worship a historical character like Jeremiah. Both men had an inward struggle or conflict but the decision of Jeremiah was more noble, more inspiring to us than that of Hamlet. "It may be said that in Jeremiah we find merely an instance in a remarkable man of the normal conflict between the backward urge towards infantilism and the forward urge towards adaptation to reality----." 2. Certainly Jeremiah found this "reality" and did so in such a successful way that his "New Covenant" was to become the name used as a term descriptive of the body of writings following the advent of Jesus.

a. As a pessimist and optimist.

Jeremiah's life was one of sorrow and grief and it is little wonder that he has been looked upon as a rank pessimist, but

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we claim that this is an unjust analysis of his character.

"With all due respect to the learned scholars who have dwelt with the great soul of Anathoth, it must be stated that he still groans under misrepresentations which amount almost to libel. His spirit cries aloud for a vindicator.---If it seems strange to claim Jeremiah as an Optimist, a Rebel or the First of the Mystics, then the fault is ours, and not the prophet's. Only by seeing his mighty personality from every angle, as one sees the every facet of a jewel, does the full brilliance of the man strike us." 1.

But to the average reader, little of optimism is to be found in the book of Jeremiah. If he was truly a pessimist, he had a good right to be. He suffered ridicule and oppression as well as bodily punishments and these were quite enough to turn the mind of almost any average man. His friends or kinsmen turned against him and plotted to kill him. "The knowledge of this produced in him a feeling of resentment, which breaks out in imprecations on his foes, startling in their concentrated force of passion (see 9:20, 22f. 12:3; 15:15; 17:18; 18:23; 20:11)." 2.

But the deeper cause for the pessimism of Jeremiah was the fact that the preached word of Yahweh had no effect on his people. The seeming futility of his word caused him to doubt, and to have a dark outlook on life. "Jeremiah has been called the

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blackest of pessimists, and among his best-known sayings some seem to justify the charge: -

Can the Ethiop change his skin,  
Or the leopard his spots?  
Then also may ye do good,  
Who are wont to do evil. - 13:23

and again,

False above all is the heart,  
And sick to despair,  
Who is to know it? - 17:9 <sup>1.</sup>

The fact that the word of Yahweh, which was such a source of inspiration and power to Jeremiah, made no impression on his hearers caused the prophet to think that people were mortally corrupt. Little wonder that he considered giving up his prophetic office, but the "burning fire in his bones" would not permit him to desert his calling. It was at dark times like these that Jeremiah turned to his God in prayer. (17:14; 17:9; 17:18)

b. As an introvert.

Because of the nature of his message which made him unpopular with his fellowmen, Jeremiah was forced to remain pretty much to himself. He was not allowed to marry, and, aside from his co-worker Baruch, perhaps had no close friend in whom he could confide. This caused Jeremiah to withdraw from the society of people whom he loved and turn to himself for what enjoyment he was to find in life. "So far as our materials enable us to judge no other prophet was more introspective or concerned

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about himself; and though it might be said that he carried this concern to a fault, yet fault or none, the fact is that no prophet started so deeply from himself as Jeremiah did." <sup>1</sup>.

But the value of this introspection was not what he fed on his own great character but that it made him discover new truths. He it is who wrestled with God trying to ascertain his own individuality and worth in relationship with God of the universe. In his quiet meditative moments he came to discover the "New Covenant" and learned that he had a direct contact with his Father that no amount of ill-will or persecution could take away from him. Yes Jeremiah was an introvert but this was a blessing, rather than otherwise, to people of the world through the centuries to follow.

## 2. The Mind of Jeremiah .

Ordinarily, Jeremiah is not thought of as one of the great thinkers of the ages, but this he has proved himself to be. Early in his life he learned to use his mind and to solve problems from a rational standpoint as well as from a moral or religious view. "In him spirituality and reasoning power were linked. His subsequent career shows what a strong grasp he had of difficult situations. He used his mind on every problem which confronted him. He dared, as we shall see, even to challenge a divine impulse until consent can be based on conviction." <sup>2</sup>.

1. George Adam Smith, op. cit., p. 4-6.

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1. George Adam Smith, op. cit., p. 4-6.

2. Raymond Galkin, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 18.



Jeremiah was of a discerning nature and remembered events and situations in life with their weaknesses and strength, and applied these to the problem he had in hand. While a shepherd near Anathoth he learned to ponder over the things he had seen and heard in the city of Jerusalem and tried to solve the riddle of life in its relation to God and his world. He never allowed his emotions to gain, or at least to keep, an upper hand in his life and so kept his mind clear to consider the true nature of a problem and to reach spiritual truths. He used his intellect in arguing with God and thus was able to set a practical example in religious living that was to meet the needs of untold generations.

"While he was wrestling with God for his own soul - although he wished to drag away from Him, yet stayed by compulsion although he wished to plead for his people but might not, although he wished to weep over the fate of his people but could not - he became the discoverer of the religious ego of his personal self. He became a religious thinker who kept even in the face of God Himself his own personality." <sup>1</sup>.

The prophets before the time of Jeremiah were content to receive the word of Yahweh and to pass it on but not so with Jeremiah. He would not pass on a command unless he felt in his own mind that it was expedient and best in the long run. He reflected on what Yahweh revealed to him and thus made a great advance over any of his predecessors. His early life lived among

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1. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 339



Jeremiah was of a discerning nature and remembered events and situations in life with their weaknesses and strengths, and applied these to the problem he had in hand. While a shepherd near Bethany he learned to ponder over the things he had seen and heard in the city of Jerusalem and tried to solve the problem of life in its relation to God and his world. He never allowed his emotions to gain, or at least to keep, an upper hand in his life and so kept his mind clear to consider the true nature of a problem and to reach spiritual truths. He used his intellect in arguing with God and thus was able to set a practical example in religious living that was to meet the needs of untold generations.

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his fellowmen taught him the frailties and desires of his people and he made use of their limitations and abilities to receive truth in the nature of illustrations used to convey a truth. "His ability to make effective use of his early experiences was due largely to intellectual powers at once reflective and alert.-----He was a thinker before he was a prophet, or, one might almost say he became a prophet because he was first a thinker." <sup>1</sup>.

### 3. Jeremiah the Poet.

The fact that our prophet was a poet is often overlooked by students. It is true that this fact is not obvious when we read his book in the translations of today but in the original Hebrew, it has been found, that many of his verses can safely be called literary gems. Early Hebrew poetry would not be recognized as such by most people today but it was sung in such a fashion as to give it a rhythm that was not obvious on reading. This early poetry had two principles at heart and these were, first, the principle of parallelism of meaning; second, the principle of sound.<sup>2</sup> In this poetry, and also in Jeremiah, the chief aim was not rhythm, nor poetical sound, but meaning. Because of this chief emphasis the elements of poetry which we consider as essential today were subordinated to the attempt of bringing out the meaning intended.

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1. Lindsay B. Longacre, A Prophet of the Spirit, p. 32-33

2. See Raymond Calkins, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 68-69; also see George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, p. 33-34



his fellowmen taught him the frailties and desires of his people and he made use of their limitations and abilities to convey a naive truth in the nature of illustrations used to convey a truth. His ability to make effective use of his early experiences was due largely to intellectual powers at once reflective and alert.-----He was a thinker before he was a prophet, or, one might almost say he became a prophet because he was first a thinker. I.

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1. Lindsay B. Langstaff, A Prophet of the Spirit, p. 32-33.  
2. See Raymond Galkin, Jeremiah the Prophet, p. 68-69; also see George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, p. 33-34.



Jeremiah was not a poet in words but in meanings. "He was not an artist in words; he is given to repetition and the use of stereotyped formulae;---He at any rate can touch the heart, and is free from affectation. His greatest poem is his own fascinating character." <sup>1</sup>. The prophet drew his illustrations from men and nature and his rich imagination was all that was needed to be coupled with his knowledge of the commonplace to make him a poet in the true sense of the word. Jeremiah lays claim to the title of poet because he lived a poetical life of imagination and had the ability to see fanciful interpretations in the ordinary. He was a realist in his poetical fancies and could well say with George Crabbe, "I paint the cot, as Truth will paint it, and as bards will not."<sup>2</sup>.

So Jeremiah draws his poetry from the ordinary walks of life and in doing so touches human life. His metaphors are homely and humble and his realism is often evident in his poetry. His has been termed "the pithiest poetry in existence."<sup>3</sup>. "To be able to weave into the spirit of poetry and passion the scrubwood of the Jordan valley, the crouching lion, a woman in Ramah, a lazy ploughman, a skillful angler, a careless shepherd and a dozen other homely and delicate touches; surely to do this

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1. T. K. Cheyne, Jeremiah His Life and Times, p. 202-203.

2. George Crabbe, "The Village," found in English Poetry and Prose of the Romantic Movement, p. 155.

3. T. Crouther Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 169



Jeremiah was not a poet in words but in meaning. "He was not an artist in words; he is given to repetition and the use of stereotyped formulae;--He at any rate can touch the heart, and in this lies his greatness. His greatest poem is his own life." 1. The prophet drew his illustrations from men and nature and his rich imagination was all that was needed to be coupled with his knowledge of the commonplace to make him a poet in the true sense of the word. Jeremiah gave claim to the title of poet because he lived a poetical life of imagination and had the ability to see fanciful interpretations in the ordinary. He was a realist in his poetical language and would well say with George Crabbe, "I paint the cot, as truth will paint it, and no birds will not." 2.

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1. T. E. Chace, Jeremiah His Life and Times, p. 202-203.  
 2. George Crabbe, "The Village," found in English Poetry and Prose of the Romantic Movement, p. 152.  
 3. T. Grosvenor Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 163.



with felicity and literary effect is no mean success, and all this the poet of Anathoth has accomplished." <sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah shows his poetic nature by his wide use of parables or symbolical actions. His observing eye saw in the almond tree a revelation of the watchfulness of Yahweh. In the boiling cauldron he sees a significant warning to his people. He acted out symbolical actions such as his hiding of the waistband, the wearing of the wooden and iron yokes, and the sending of a scroll to Babylon to be read and then sunk in the Euphrates so as to designate the sinking of the Babylonian power. Besides these actions there is his observant nature that caused him to discover new truths in things other people saw every day. From his observation of the potter and the clay comes one of the most significant pictures we have in the whole Bible. He also sees the enemy as a lion sneaking up on its prey, and his picture of death is one long to be remembered.

"For Death steals up by our lattices,  
Enters even our palaces,  
Clearing the child from the street,  
The youths from the squares:  
And strewn are the forms of men,  
On the face of the field,  
Like sheaves behind the reaper,  
That nobody gleans." (Jer. 9:20-21)<sup>2</sup>.

Jeremiah was a prophet and a poet of the people. His heart burst with the longing for his people and he tries with all his might to turn them from destruction to face and enjoy the living God. In this attempt his picture of the maid is extremely poetical and appropriate. "Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a

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1. T. Crouther Gordon, op. ci. p. 167.

2. T. Crouther Gordon, ibid., p. 181.



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Jeremiah shows his poetic nature by his wide use of parables or symbolical actions. His observing eye saw in the world a revelation of the watchfulness of Yahweh. In the boiling cauldron he sees a significant warning to his people. He noted out symbolical actions such as the hiding of the watch-band, the wearing of the wooden and iron yokes, and the sending of a scroll to Babylon to be read and then sunk in the Euphrates as a designation of the sinking of the Babylonian power. Besides these actions there is his observant nature that caused him to discover new truths in things other people see every day. From his observation of the potter and the clay comes one of the most significant pictures we have in the whole Bible. He also sees the enemy as a lion sneaking up on its prey, and his picture of death is one long to be remembered.

"For death awaits up by our fountains,  
Enters even our palace,  
Gleaming the child from the street.  
The youths from the squares:  
And arrows are the form of men,  
On the face of the field,  
Like a snare behind the reaper,  
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bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number." (Jer. 2:32) Many of his expressions come out of his subjective tendencies but in all of them shines a refreshing spontaneity that makes them ring with sincerity and passion.

In his description of the Scythian invasion overshadowing Jerusalem, Jeremiah reaches his greatest heights in pure lyrical expression. "The most noteworthy feature of these oracles is their purely lyrical character. They are, as one critic has said, 'genuine lyrics, the spontaneous outflow in language and imagery of inward experiences and feelings.' We note at the outset that they are not the direct word of the Lord to Jeremiah, but the effect of that word on a sensitive human heart, which gives forth its own peculiar tones like the Aeolian harp when its strings are swept by the wind."<sup>1</sup>.

It is true that we cannot claim Jeremiah as one of the great poets but we feel that we have a right to claim for him a great poetical nature. His times and circumstances were not conducive to poetical fancy but the poet spirit of Jeremiah was never completely subdued. Gordon gives us a comprehensive survey of Jeremiah as poet in these words.

"We have, then found, as we had expected, that the soul which burned with the prophetic burned also with the poetic fire. It may not be the highly technical verse of Athens or Rome. In fact, it is not. It displays a greater freedom and a more primitive and natural grace, for within the broad limits of parallelism and rhythm the poet has free scope to express

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1. John Skinner, Prophecy and Religion, p. 45-46







his passion. Jeremiah deserves to be crowned with the poetic laurels, because he penetrates and expresses his own moods in classical diction, because he clothes the pathetic end of his nation with the magic of a refined imagination, and because every verse of his poetry was wrung from his heart in blood and sweat, and is charged with the passion of a lonely crucifixion."<sup>1</sup>.

#### 4. Personal Characteristics.

We have mentioned previously that we know more about Jeremiah as a person than we do of any other prophet. This is due both to Baruch's account of Jeremiah's actions and also due to the confessions of the prophet. Jeremiah, though one of the greatest if not the foremost prophet of Israel, was a very human individual. He has been thought of as a strange and even a queer individual but his moods and traits show him to have human passions and capabilities like the ordinary man. But in a great many respects he was supreme, and far in advance of the average man.

We need to give the prophet credit for being an extremely courageous man. He was mocked, mistreated, and misunderstood by his fellowmen yet his courage allowed him to stand up and face their taunts as well as physical persecution. He had a strong message to deliver and his spirit was great enough to match his message. Even while he was in prison the prophet showed his courage was equal to the task of supporting him in adversity.

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1. T. Crouther Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 185-186



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"He was bold and vigorous with a courage that was at once physical, intellectual and spiritual. It was not a courage that was mere physical recklessness, but that deeper and more steadfast courage often found in refined and sensitive natures. In these courage has passed beyond mere physical abandon, springing out of an intense but transient excitement, and has become a splendid vigor and endurance, depending on utter surrender to exalted principles clearly seen and firmly grasped."<sup>1</sup>.

The prophet Jeremiah was not only strong hearted but he was also a strong and intense lover. He loved his people with all his heart but he loved his God still more. In his confessions he often reveals the fact that he longs for intimate companionship with his people and he was especially fond of children (9:20; 6:11) and probably longed to marry or else he would not have received the command to refrain from marriage. It is true he turns on individuals and curses them but when he is treating the nation as a whole he speaks of it as a loving mother might of her child. He loved people with a strong intensity and passion that was also a characteristic of Jesus centuries later.

In his youth in the wilds about Anathoth the prophet acquired one of his traits that was to be a part of him through life. He learned to observe and when he turned his contemplative gaze on any situation or thing he looked with sympathy and understanding. He knew the trials and the life of his people, learned both through experience and observation. "He moved through life with open eyes and a loving heart.--He had watched

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1. Lindsay B. Longacre, A Prophet of the Spirit, p. 36-37



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the farmer in the field (4:3), the children in the street (6:11) and the refiner of silver sitting over his crucible (6:27-30). He knew the strife of debtor and creditor (15:10), the humiliation of the thief when caught (2:26), the lamentations for the dead (16:5), and the innocent festivities of brides and weddings (2:32; 7:34)."<sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah has often been condemned for the fact that he turns on his enemies and curses them, seeking divine punishment on them. It is true Jeremiah wished and desired vengeance on his tormentors but this only seems to make him more human to those who know him. The people, who should have been his best friends, were his direct enemies and not only thwarting the plans and the hopes of the prophet but also persecuting him in a severe manner. Because of this grave injustice and the unloving methods of these people Jeremiah turns upon them with imprecations.<sup>2</sup>.

"But have we not seen already that Jeremiah is a man of extremes, scorning the dull, mediocre levels of life, with a spirit too passionate for common achievements? If, on the one hand, we find him a man of intense tenderness of heart, singing to win the heart of the Maid of Israel sweeter than any other songster, we can hardly express surprise that when his mighty purpose is thwarted by pride and prejudice he should vent a righteous indignation against the enemies of Jehovah."<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Lindsay B. Longacre, op. cit. p. 31.

2. See Jeremiah, 18:19-23; 11:18f; 15:15f.; 17:18; and 21:11-12.

3. T. Crouther Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 59-60



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Our prophet is popularly known as the "weeping prophet" but this is only one of many of his moods. He was by nature an optimist, hoping against hope, if need be, for the best. But as we have pointed out he was of a poetical nature and with his high-strung temperament was subject to changing moods. He loved deeply and also could hate deeply but his hate was directed for the most part against the sins of his people rather than the people themselves. "Jeremiah's was a susceptible, deeply emotional nature. The adverse course of events impresses him profoundly; and he utters without reserve the emotions which in consequence are stirred within him.----he breaks out into bitter lamentations and complaints, he calls for vengeance upon his persecutors, he accuses the Almighty of injustice, he wishes himself unborn."<sup>1</sup> These moods were not always rational<sup>2</sup>. but they serve to reveal the human spirit of a man closer to God than any other Old Testament character.

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1. S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 274

2. "Sometimes Jeremiah became cynical, and in his cynical moods he spoke as foolishly as the rest of us." Charles E. Jefferson Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah, p. 14



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## Chapter IX

### Jeremiah and the Continuity of the Religious Impulse

#### 1. Jeremiah-----the Link between Moses and Jesus.

Moses brought the people of Israel out of bondage and caused them to think of themselves as a people apart, a nation unto themselves. In a more particular sense he gave the Israelites the idea that Yahweh was their God in a peculiar way. Jewish commentators liked to note these resemblances between Moses and Jeremiah. They both prophesied for forty years, Moses was placed in the water and Jeremiah into a pit. The former was drawn up out of the water by a bond-maid while Jeremiah was saved from the pit by a slave. But as Potter points out the resemblance between Moses and Jeremiah is much more significant than this.

"But the resemblance of Jeremiah to Moses was much deeper. The connecting link is rather to be found in the Book of Deuteronomy which represents the ethical ideal which Moses had been striving for and which advocates the reforms which Jeremiah urged so vehemently. In other words, the torch which Moses laid down and which for a time smouldered, was caught by a group of prophets of which Jeremiah was the greatest."<sup>1</sup>.

Jeremiah has been called the connecting link between Moses and Jesus because he was just that in a historical sense. Moses knew a God of the nation, terrible, awful, and powerful,

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1. Charles Francis Potter, The Story of Religion, p. 151



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I. Jeremiah-----the link between Moses and Jesus.

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though condescending in a comforting way to Israel. Jesus revealed God as the God of the universe, as well as of the individual, a God of love and justice. Jeremiah comes between these two extremes, recognizing the beliefs of the patriarch and at the same time laying a foundation on which Jesus might build. Jeremiah stresses the fact of personal responsibility and in doing so prepares the way for the teachings of Jesus.

## 2. Jeremiah and Jesus.

Jeremiah the prophet has been compared with both modern writers and men of past ages. These comparisons have been of great interest but for us there is a still greater interest in his comparison with or similarity to Jesus. It is significant indeed to find that the contemporaries of Jesus saw a strong resemblance in him to the prophet Jeremiah. (Matt. 16:14). And this resemblance was not a passing fancy for there were real grounds for believing the Nazarene was the prophet come to life. When we review the prophet's life we find several instances in it that are comparable to those of Jesus. Jeremiah stood at the temple gate telling the people they were putting their trust in empty forms and in a like manner Jesus entered the temple and overthrew the tables of the money changers.<sup>1</sup> Both of them

used parables to impress their teachings on the minds of their

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1. See H. Wheeler Robinson, The Cross of Jeremiah, p. 42-43. "So there were good grounds for those who in our Lord's time identified Him with the prophet of Anathoth, come back to earth, and there is peculiar congruity in the fact that the figure of the Lamb of God, which has become the rightful name of Jesus, historically and primarily belongs to this forerunner of His, who said of Himself, with perfect truth, that he was like a lamb led to the slaughter."



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public, both of them were 'despised and rejected' and still again, both of them learned to find a peculiar sense of comfort and satisfying strength in personal relationship with the Father. "Jeremiah is not unfitly called a 'type', and unfinished sketch as it were, of the unique, the incomparable One." <sup>1</sup>.

The prophet Jeremiah must have left a deep impression on the minds of men after his death for his personality was known in the time of Jesus and made the people think they saw the prophet in the Messiah. There are a great many personal characteristics that are similar and when these are reviewed we learn to appreciate the true worth of Jeremiah more and more. A brief comparison of the lives of the two men is given by Potter.

"They were both, so we are informed, sanctified from the womb to the special service of God. Both were probably celibate, sacrificing home joys that they might be entirely devoted to their hard task. They were both looked upon as heretics and destructive critics and charged with blasphemy and treason for predicting the destruction of the temple.----They were both persecuted and their deaths planned by those they loved and were trying to save."<sup>2</sup>.

Jesus and Jeremiah were alike in spirit, both were sensitive and naturally reserved but both also found the courage that enabled them to speak with a fiery spirit when the occasion demanded it. Jeremiah wept over his people, while Jesus

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1. T. K. Cheyne, Jeremiah His Life and Times, p. 202

2. Charles Francis Potter, The Story of Religion, p. 104



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1. T. R. Gwynne, Jeremiah His Life and Times, p. 202  
2. Charles Francis Potter, The Story of Religion, p. 104



wept over Jerusalem. Jesus knew and recognized the true genius in the prophet's soul and pays him undying tribute in his words, "This cup is the new testament in My blood."<sup>1</sup> (Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25). Here is where we appreciate the significance of the comparison of the two men. Jesus and Jeremiah both lived and agonized that this new relationship between God and man might be consummated and a newer, richer life enjoyed here on earth.

### 3. Jeremiah for Today, and Tomorrow.

The prophet Jeremiah lived over twenty-five hundred years ago but there is more and more interest being shown in him because men want to know him and his religious life. Men have not always had the same conceptions of God that we hold today but we do know that man is 'incurably religious' and has been that through the ages. Jeremiah was religious in a peculiar sense and he fanned his spark of religious instinct into a consuming flame that filtered all the dross of his persecuted life and made him to triumph in the face of his enemies and his own self. The prophet received much from former prophets but in him the religious impulse rose to new heights. "Jeremiah stood on other men's shoulders, but standing there, he used his opportunity to reach higher than all of them."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah the prophet lived for his own day and also for posterity. The sound religious views that he taught his people were universal in their application and as applicable today as they were when the prophet delivered his messages in Jerusalem.

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1. See T. Crouther Gordon, The Rebel Prophet, p. 245-247

2. H. Wheeler Robinson, The Cross of Jeremiah, p. 74



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The prophet believed in the one true God of Israel and he dwells on the love of this God and his righteousness.<sup>1</sup> He tells his people and us that Yahweh demands personal surrender to his will by the individual rather than observance of external forms. In this he reveals a religious experience that was to be the means of leading future generations into the very presence of God as Jeremiah was led. "In some of these passages (the confessions) we feel the very heart-throb of the prophet. As we read, we find ourselves breathing the rarest atmosphere of prayer, and we are amazed and awed by the daring which seeks to penetrate beyond the veil of the holiest and to enter into the immediate presence of the Most High."<sup>2</sup>

He taught that which we need to realize today, that there is no need of priest, preacher, teacher, or mediator for the soul to reach into the very presence of the eternal. His religion was an endeavor to lift his whole and complete personality to a unity and completion in the presence and will of his Father God. In this conception of religion he placed it on the same high level that Jesus was to do centuries later. Jeremiah believed in the existence and the knowability of God and he sees Him expressed in nature<sup>3</sup>. and he further reveals God to us as a God of righteousness and of love.<sup>4</sup> "He believes, as

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1. See George Adam Smith, Jeremiah, p. 356-357.

2. George W. Thorne, The Prophets of Israel, p. 112.

3. Jeremiah 27:5-6; 4:24-26; 1:11-12; 5:22; 14:22; 3:3; 5:24.

4. Jeremiah 9:23-24; 31:3-6, 20; 31:34; 3:12-13; 9:5-6; 22:15-16.

5. Charles S. Jefferson, Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah, p. 36.



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we shall see, in a God of love, but it is not a sentimental love. It is a love that is conditioned by the moral order. God will uproot the tree of his own planting for righteousness sake."<sup>1</sup> In this conception of the righteousness of the personality of God, Jeremiah advances beyond his predecessors who did not quite comprehend that the righteousness of God also implied that his divine character was inviolate and had to be upheld. The character of God was far superior to any people.

We have a great need for the spirit of Jeremiah today. Perhaps never before, even in his own time, was that spirit needed in the world as it is today. We have institutionalized our churches until religion is often only a by-product instead of the one great aim. We need the spirit of Jeremiah to reveal to us, God. Jeremiah spiritualized religion in his own day and it is his spiritualizing influence that is sorely needed for today and for tomorrow. Religion is not tradition, custom nor institution, but is an affair of the heart. "Jeremiah proclaimed that glorious message twenty-five hundred years ago, and the world has not learned it yet. We are still in need of Jeremiah."<sup>2</sup> To this statement we may add that the world will always need Jeremiah because his truths were universal, and his revelations of the Father are essential for man in any age.

"All in all, the world has seen few greater than he. It has seen many who have had greater worldly success, many with greater prosperity and more joy, but few men of greater and

1. Clyde E. Wildman, Graduate Course No. II, Lesson VIII, p. 1  
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2. Charles E. Jefferson, Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah, p. 56.



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and finer will power."<sup>1</sup>.

#### Chapter X

In this character study of Jeremiah we have tried to discover what it is that made him a man among men in his own time and also for the ages. In order to do this we have had to study the man, his moods, his beliefs, and his actions as well as his historical setting. If these pages have in any way led to a better understanding of the noble "forerunner" of Jesus Christ they have then been successful in setting forth the true character of the prophet, Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah begins with the scroll read by Baruch in the court or rather the second scroll which was rewritten and enlarged the following year. The first mention of the book appeared then, in 624 B. C., and probably the last touch from Jeremiah's hand was given to it about 585 B. C. Baruch the scribe of Jeremiah was a very close and intimate friend of the prophet and faithfully reproduced his messages received in dictation or from memory. The confessions of Jeremiah are a small but significant library of heart-searchings of the prophet. The book of Jeremiah is preserved in both Greek and the Hebrew text. The former is shorter than the Hebrew and suggests that other revisions may have taken place through the years. Not all the book can be ascribed to Jeremiah and the only safe guide of ascertaining his authorship is to reject as interpolations all passages that pertain to a later period than 586 B. C.<sup>1</sup> The book consists of prophecies, and

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1. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, p. 366.

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## Chapter X

### Summary

In order to know Jeremiah we must know his life and this is best revealed to us in his book. He is the author of his book although Baruch, his scribe, probably wrote the most of it for him, and many interpolations are to be found. The book was compiled over a number of years beginning with the scroll read by Baruch in the court or rather the second roll which was rewritten and enlarged the following year. The first section of the book appeared then, in 604 B. C. and probably the last touch from Jeremiah's hand was given to it about 585 B. C. Baruch the scribe of Jeremiah was a very close and intimate friend of the prophet and faithfully reproduced his messages received in dictation or from memory. The confessions of Jeremiah are a small but significant library of heart-searchings of the prophet. The book of Jeremiah is preserved in both Greek and the Hebrew text. The former is shorter than the Hebrew and suggests that other revisions may have taken place through the years. Not all the book can be ascribed to Jeremiah and the only safe guide of ascertaining his authorship is to reject as interpolations all sections that pertain to a later period than 586 B. C.<sup>1</sup> The book consists of prophecies, and narrative sections and a parallel to a section in II Kings.

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Jeremiah came into his ministry at a most troublesome time for Israel and his ministry covers a period of over forty years. Moral corruption was rampant and religious life at a low ebb in Israel, all of which challenged the prophet to redeem his people and called forth the highest type of character.

Jeremiah was born (645 B. C.) in the little village of Anathoth, near Jerusalem, and since he made visits to the city in his youth, Jerusalem had an influence on him early in life. He came from a priestly family and his father probably filled his youthful mind with stories of the glorious past. Jeremiah received a good training for the task of prophet, first by his lonely but productive walks with nature when he was still a shepherd or farmer in or near the wilds of Anathoth. Then the city of Jerusalem with its temple, worship and sacrifices, together with tradition served to fire the imagination of the young Jeremiah. There was a considerable amount of Hebrew literature available in his day and he no doubt was familiar with it. The joys and aspirations of his people and their great religious antipathy aroused in him a patriotic fire that made a deep impression on him. All of these things he meditated upon as he continued his humble task of shepherd. So he was ready for his call when it came in 626 B. C. His call revealed to him that his was the difficult task of preaching an unwelcome message to his people. But his subsequent visions strengthened him for he saw that Yahweh was awake and would make him a fortified city against the whole land for his was to be the



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conflicting mission of building and tearing down, planting and uprooting the nations of the world.

Jeremiah is termed one of the major prophets probably because his ministry covered such a long time and also because of the size of his book. He was one of the greatest of the prophets because of his life and his contribution. In his prophetic ministry we find six significant dates. The first of these is 626 B. C. the time of his call. In 621 B. C. the New Law Book was discovered that made an external change in the religious life of the people but the spiritual life of the masses remained unchanged. In 608 B. C. the good king Josiah was killed at Megiddo and Jeremiah had to explain why Yahweh permitted the Israelites to suffer this defeat at a time when the nation was attempting a reform instead of in the evil days of Manasseh. In 604 B. C., Jeremiah had Baruch write the first roll that proved to be the foundation of his book. In 597 B. C. the inevitable happened and Jerusalem fell and the first deportation of the Jews to Babylon took place. In 586 B. C. Jerusalem again fell and was burnt by the Chaldeans who carried off the greater part of the city's inhabitants to Babylon and into captivity. Following this Jeremiah was carried to Egypt by his countrymen when they fled from Jerusalem and the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar after the governor Gedaliah had been murdered. Here in Egypt the prophet ended his long life still preaching and begging his people to turn to Yahweh.



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Jeremiah was a prophet and a knowledge of the prophetic movement is necessary so we may understand what the prophetic office meant. Prophecy is not indigeneous to Israel but it was here that it received its distinctive characteristics. Moses is considered the first of the prophets. After him comes the seer followed by ecstatic bands of prophets that traveled about the country side. Next we discover the bands or companies of prophets under Elijah and Elisha and next and last, the appearance of the individual prophet. Each one of these stages represents an advance in the prophetic movement and the individual prophet, of which Jeremiah is one, represents the culmination of the prophetic movement in Israel.

Previous to the time of Jeremiah covenants were known to the people of Israel but not the kind that the prophet made for them. A covenant was a promise between two parties or individuals and was thought to be absolutely binding. The original idea was that the covenant was between Yahweh and the nation of Israel but Jeremiah reveals a New Covenant in which the individual plays a central part. The prophet decided that a revival of the old covenants would be ineffectual so he brings forth his New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Its essential characteristics are (1) Inwardness; (2) Individualism; and (3) Forgiveness of Sins. This new relationship would cause the priesthood to disappear but the prophet looks forward to the ideal day wherein all men will be God-conscious and know Him for themselves. The personal religious life of the prophet was conducive to the



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conception of such a compact between the individual and Yahweh. In his confessions the prophet reveals his inner struggles, doubts and hopes that together resulted in his New Covenant. His heart-revealing confessions are found in Jer. 11:18-23; 12:1-3, 5, 6; 15:10-18; 15:19-21; 17:9-10; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12 and 20:14-18.

Jeremiah has been called the 'weeping prophet' partly because people thought him to be the author of Lamentations but also due to the fact that he really wept for his people. The prophet could stand personal persecution much better than he could stand the apathy of his people when the will of Yahweh was mentioned to them. When the prophet discovered that the people were going to destruction because they would not listen to his preached word, he wept. But he was rather of an optimistic nature naturally than of the weepy kind. He is called the rebel prophet because he rebelled and taught rebellion against commonly accepted practices of his day. He was considered a rebel because he would do away with the Torah and priesthood and also was thought to be a rebel politically. The prophet was well acquainted with Deuteronomy and agreed with its reforms except that he wished to go much farther than the reform indicated with the individual. But when the reform failed Jeremiah knew that a new compact was needed. Because of his foresight and his own religious life, Jeremiah has won for himself a place in history. He greatly influenced other Old Testament characters as well as Jesus and is still influencing men today.



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Jeremiah held personal beliefs that proved to be iron-clad convictions but they did not always meet with the approval of his people. His beliefs concerning the temple, the sacrificial system, image worship, and patriotism brought down the enmity of the public on his head. He told them that the temple would be destroyed like Shiloh and this caused a furor of feeling. The temple worship, as conducted with its impersonal sacrifices, the prophet thought was abominable to God. He especially attacks idol worship and in a subtle but efficient way makes fun of the idols and their worshipers. He shows them that a different kind of worship is needed, a worship of the heart. He was a strong patriot yet was considered unpatriotic and a traitor because he preached the inevitable destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity to come. He advised the defenders of the city to desert to the enemy. He knew that this was the only way the people would save their lives yet he was misunderstood for his new-kind of patriotism and imprisoned.

Jeremiah has been termed an epileptic and has been compared with Hamlet and others who were thought to be psychic subjects. He has been considered an undue pessimist but his life of hardship, persecution, and danger could hardly have allowed him to appear as otherwise. Yet behind all this the prophet was optimistic in that he found a new relation for the individual with God, giving a new happy outlook on life. He was an introvert because he learned this trait early in his shepherd life and also because he was shut off from the society of men and therefore forced to seek the company of his inner nature. This



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caused him to use his mind as few other prophets have done with the result that he is considered one of the great minds of the Old Testament. His discerning meditative nature gave him new depths of great revelations of God and his universe. He was a poet, not so much for the poetry he produced but because his was a truly poetical and an imaginative soul. In the most common place things he discerned a revelation of some truth from God. We know that the prophet was courageous because he seldom showed fear and seldom showed anger. Retiring by nature yet he was bold and vigorous in his fight for God. He was a lover of his people, a meditative and observant individual worthy of his office.

Moses, the first of the prophets, gave to Israel a national instinct and upheld the monotheistic ideal. Jeremiah bridges the gap between Moses and Jesus by building upon all the contributions of past prophets and adding his great contribution of the individual's worth in the sight of God. The prophet was a forerunner of Jesus and the latter copied or learned much from the religious prophet, the greatest gift was that of the New Covenant which Jesus used in his Commemorative feast. The contemporaries of Jesus thought he must be Jeremiah himself come back to life. This indicates the deep impression that the prophet left on his contemporaries and future generations. His religious truths were needed in his own day but are still applicable today and will also be for tomorrow because they are universal in their outlook. The character and contributions



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of the prophet, Jeremiah, will continue to be<sup>a</sup> shining light and challenge to people of all ages.

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of the prophet, Jeremiah, will continue to be a living light  
and challenge to people of all ages.



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